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MARK'S HEAVY EYES RESTED A MOMENT ON THE LITHE, SMALL FORM, CLASPED CLOSE IN THE STRANGER'S EMBRACE!

LITTLE MRS. ENDERSBY.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

All Clareville was startled when the news came that Squire Endersby was married. Year in and year out he had been the legitimate prey of match-making mammas with marriageable daughters, but not all their blandishments had availed to change his fixed resolve to live and die a bachelor. He was now thirty-four, a man of fine presence, with a face that was noble rather than handsome, and a favourite with all who knew him. And now he had committed the unpardonable sin of marrying a "foreigner," as the good people of Clareville termed all folks not born in their county.

"She is a mere nobody, I suppose," said little Mrs. Cray, "I never heard anyone say they knew the Carrolls."

Abigail Venne laughed shortly.

"You stay at home too much," she said, "and read your papers too little. Anyone outside this benighted place could tell you that the present Mrs. Endersby was Connie Carroll, the actress; and her mother was an actress before her."

That Mark Endersby should marry a "foreigner" was bad enough, but that the "foreigner" should be a "play acting woman" was infinitely worse, and it was a vexed question with the good folks if they should recognise Mrs. Endersby. But the squire was a power in the county, and a rich man to boot; it would not do to offend him. Well, they must wait, and see if his bride could, by any possibility, be admitted into their sacred circle. Only Abigail Venne, setting her teeth hard, vowed that she never would extend the hand of friendship to a third-rate actress, whose antecedents were wholly unknown. But then it was an open secret that Abigail had herself wished to marry Mark Endersby.

On Saturday the newly-wedded pair returned

to Clareville, but as it was very late, and the bride wore a thick veil as protection against a bitter wind, no one saw her face.

The next morning the church was full to overflowing; everybody was anxious to see the squire's lady. There was a little flutter, a sound of subdued whispering, as Mark walked up the aisle with his bride; and a sense of disappointment filled many a heart as curious eyes rested upon her. She was a little woman, slight and willowy in figure, and what charms she had were Nature's own. Her face was oval, rather pale than otherwise; her waving brown hair was twisted loosely about a shapely little head; and from beneath level brows looked out a pair of grave, grey eyes, shadowed by thick, short lashes.

"She isn't even pretty," was the universal comment, but the men, at least, altered their decision when she turned to thank Mark for some slight service, with a smile. What a smile it was! How it changed and beautified the whole face. No wonder Mark looked so proud of his bride!

And Abigail Venne's handsome features bore an expression of intense hatred, as she realized that her successful rival had the power to sway men's hearts as she, with all her beauty, never could.

An actress! a common actress, to win the prize she coveted! A little insignificant creature, who had hardly attained her majority, to play successfully against her!

The thought was gall and wormwood to the handsome, stately woman. She was verging on thirty, gently born, possessed of a comfortable fortune, and yet no man had ever been known to love Abigail Venne—and, with all the strength of her ill-regulated mind, her passionate heart, she worshipped Mark Endersby, and for his sake hated his young wife. Oh! if she could only destroy the peace of that paradise in which they now dwelt! If only, by sowing seeds of dissension between them, she could turn Mark's thoughts first, and then his heart, towards herself!

That was the burden of her reverie throughout the long and dreary sermon, and when the last hymn had been sung and the benediction pronounced, she rose in all her stateliness, and walked slowly towards the porch. There she was joined by the Endersbys, and Mark, with a proud air of proprietorship, introduced his wife to the woman who loved him.

Little Mrs. Endersby lifted her grey eyes to the handsome face above, and there was a look of unfeigned admiration in them.

"I am glad to know you," she said, in the softest and prettiest of voices; "Mr. Endersby has told me much about you, so that really you do not seem a stranger to me."

Her manner was as frank as it was composed; it angered Abigail to feel that she was not overwhelmed by her beauty or her birth, but she answered courteously, and even expressed a hope that their acquaintance might ripen into friendship. Then she went her way, with a heart full of envy, hatred, and malice; but of this Mark and his wife were blissfully unconscious.

It was January when the squire brought home his wife, and by March she had attained a popularity which surprised even Mark. Those who had voted her "not pretty" sang now to another tune; her smile, her pleasant, unaffected ways, her little humorous sallies, were now all declared delightful, and most folks spoke of her as "that fascinating little woman." Abigail saw and heard all with a bitter and jealous heart; but there was no one whose good opinion and whose esteem Connie valued so much as hers.

They were sitting together one day quite at the close of March, and Connie was looking her prettiest in a deep-toned crimson gown, with a cluster of daffodils at her breast. She had been laughingly telling some of her early experiences on the stage, and she ended with the words:

"I never should have been famous, I believe I was always more or less frightened when I went on. I never could hope to be a Siddons or a Terry, so I was relegated to a lower level; I took small parts, and I did not always play them well. I often wonder what Mark saw in me to love."

She paused, her eyes grown dreamy, and a smile of utter content lingered about her pretty head.

"I suppose," said Abigail, "Mr. Endersby first met you at the theatre?"

"Yes, then our manager, who knew him very well, brought him to the green room, and, at his request, introduced him. I think" in a lowered tone, "I think it was love at sight with both of us, and that he should care for me is wonderful in the extreme. I had not even beauty to win his heart."

"Beauty," said Abigail, with bitterness, "is not the power it is represented to be. But, dear Mrs. Endersby, how relieved your friends must be to know that you are safely shel-

tered by a good man's love: The stage is fraught with dangers."

"The dangers are greatly exaggerated, I think, and, Miss Venne, I have no friends. For Mark's sake, perhaps it is well."

"No friends! Oh! poor Connie,—I may call you Connie? Thank you—but I certainly understood your mother lived."

Connie's bright face clouded, it seemed to Abigail that a tremor passed over her, although her voice was perfectly steady as she said:

"My mother died three years ago. Her malady was a broken heart. My father I do not remember, and my only brother is dead too; so, but for Mark, in all the world I stand alone."

"That is very sad," said Abigail; and shortly after she took her leave, going slowly and thoughtfully homewards.

"How strange she looked when she spoke of her mother," she mused; "I wonder if there is any disgraceful story connected with her! I wish I could see into her past—and it is decidedly strange that she should have no sole surviving relative, I don't and I don't believe that statement. I am sure, quite sure, there is something hidden in her history."

In April a series of entertainments were given in aid of the neighbouring hospital; there was a concert first, then a bazaar, and, as the funds still fell short, it was proposed to give a theatrical performance. Mrs. Cray said "Of course one feels a certain delicacy in asking Mrs. Endersby to play, it seems a polite way of reminding her of her origin, and I, for one, would not like to hurt her." She is decidedly an acquisition to society here."

Abigail laughed. "Make me your ambassador, Connie will do a great deal for me, and I believe she is positively hankering for an hour before the footlights. Naturally, she will put us into the shades but our audience will not be very critical."

So it was decided to interview little Mrs. Endersby, and Abigail did the interviewing. It surprised her to find Connie unwilling to play; and indeed, she had a difficult task to wrest even the conditional promise from her "If Mark does not mind, I will do my best to serve you."

Mark did object; but Abigail over-ruled all his objections, and finally went away triumphant; and throughout the next few days the rehearsals so occupied Connie's leisure hours that her husband saw very little of her.

The play chosen was of a very stereotyped character, the dialogue poor, and the acting of the crudest description. Connie was in great requisition, and it was felt that the success of the whole affair rested upon her shoulders.

The eventful night came; and, perhaps because she knew that her husband was amongst those who looked and listened, Connie acted with a *verve* and spirit she had never displayed before.

The final scene was reached; thunders of applause greeted the heroine, as she appeared in all the glory of her dainty robes and glistening jewels. Just a moment she stood erect, excitement lending the tinge of colour her face needed to make it beautiful; her eyes, bright and fearless, looked love into Mark's, as he leaned forward from his seat close by. Then, all at once, her face changed, until its expression was one of horror; her eyes were dilated, her breath came in great gasps. Slowly, slowly her hands stole upwards until they pressed her aching temples between their chilly palms.

Mark rose hurriedly, it seemed to him that she must faint; but all in a moment she recovered herself so far as to speak the words allotted to her—but how mechanically she did it. "She has exerted herself too much,"

said Mrs. Cray; but Abigail, following the direction of her gaze, saw it rested affrightedly upon a tall, handsome young fellow, and to herself she said:—"This is the beginning of the end. Now look to yourself, Connie Endersby, I mean to learn who this stranger is, and what link there is between your past and his."

The play was over; the curtain had fallen amid vociferous cheers and cries for Connie; she came wearily to the front, and her face was white as the flowers her trembling fingers held; the smile which wreathed her lips had nothing of joyousness in it; and her eyes were deadly tired.

Slowly the people departed; but Abigail Venne loitered in the hall-way; she said to those who asked as they passed: "Oh! I am staying to congratulate Mrs. Endersby upon her success; really, her playing was exceptionally clever."

Then she saw Mark go to the green-room, whilst in the shadows lurked the man whose coming had so unnerved Connie. She drew back into her nook, resolved now to see the end of this strange mystery; and presently Connie came out, cloaked and veiled, leaning as if for support upon Mark's arm.

They did not see the waiting woman, she stood so far in the shadows; and her eyes grew bright with cruel triumph as she saw a man's figure brush hurriedly by the advancing couple, and a man's hand thrust a slip of paper into Connie's hand as he passed.

Abigail, turning swiftly, went to her carriage; she was sure now that her lucky rival was not what she had seemed; that she was wifely deceiving the man who held her dearer than all his worldly possessions.

"I will unmask her yet," she said, setting her teeth hard, "he shall see her in all her wickedness—and then let her look to herself."

Meanwhile, the Endersbys had reached home, and as Mark's eyes rested upon his wife's pale face, he said tenderly:

"You have over-rated your strength, sweetheart; henceforth I refuse to let you take part in any similar entertainment. You belong to me now, and for my sake you must husband your strength."

She was sitting on his knee, with his arm about her, and she smiled ever so faintly in response to his words. It seemed to Mark that she looked unusually pale and fragile, and with a sudden fear lest he should lose her, he drew her close to the heart which beat alone for her, and kissed her drooped head many times. A little sob broke from her lips; but when, in alarm, he asked what ailed her, she sat erect, and laughing, answered:

"Oh, I am quite well, only my nerves are overstrung. A long night's rest will remedy that"; and of herself she would not speak again that night.

But whilst Mark slept, she lay hopelessly awake, saying to herself over and over again the words inscribed upon that slip of paper,

"Darling Connie,—You see I am still in the flesh, and I could not resist the temptation to visit you. I have much to tell you; please meet me at eleven-thirty to-morrow morning just beyond the copse which skirts the plantation west of the church.—Always yours,
"WILL."

CHAPTER II.

In the morning Abigail walked in a leisurely fashion to Heronhay, as the squire's place was called. She was brooding over the events of the previous night, and endeavouring to see how best she could use

them to her own advantage. Suddenly lifting her eyes she saw a small, slight figure moving quickly amongst the budding alders. It was Connie. Now and again she paused and looked round as though frightened, and Abigail, screening herself behind a huge holly, watched her progress with an evil smile.

As Connie passed through the plantation, she, stooping, followed, treading cautiously lest some cracking twig might betray her. She entered the copse a few moments later than the squire's wife, and, hiding behind some low growing bushes, waited for the denouement she felt must come.

Connie was very white and nervous; there were dark circles beneath her eyes, and her whole appearance was changed. Presently there came the sound of swift footsteps, then a young fellow stepped into the open space, and, with outstretched arms, cried:

"Connie!"

"Oh, Will! Will! and I thought you dead," came the answer—as Connie, Endersby, yielded herself to his embrace. "You know word was sent me to that effect, and then I had no news of you for so long."

"Poor little girl! Yes; after my escape a fellow was found dead on the moor, and how long he had lain there no one knew; but as his complexion and height tallied with mine, he was buried in my name. I heard all this by chance; and then, and only then, did I feel safe. I wonder you recognised me last night, with my dyed hair and my well-grown beard. Con, I was half-mad, when, venturing to inquire for you, I learned you had quitted the Lysart. I was afraid that my sin had been visited upon you, and just when I was in the lowest abyss of despair, I met old Flinders, and he told me of your marriage. I came down at once. I felt I must see you just to assure myself you loved me still, despite all my faults and follies."

"I can never do anything but love you," Connie answered, brokenly, "although perhaps my conduct may seem to give the lie to my words. I am married now; and, oh, Will, my first duty is to my husband. I am afraid he would be very angry with me if he knew all the truth, because, you see, believing you were dead, I told him nothing. He is a proud man, too, and although he loves me dearly, he would not lightly forgive my deceit, or the disgrace I have brought upon him. Tell me how to help you. I will do all that lies in my power; but, Will, oh, my poor Will! I am afraid we may not meet again, and you must not often write."

"Then he is more to you, infinitely more, than I ever was," the young fellow said, jealously, "and you are ashamed of me."

"Not ashamed, Will! oh, never! that! How can I be remembering why you sinned? But—but oh, how can I make you understand what it is I mean? I am the wife of an honourable gentleman, who has given me all he has to give. Surely, however hurt and angry you may be, you will acknowledge my first duty is to him. And sometimes I will write you, and never will I forget you. I will keep you in my heart, praying for you always, loving you more now than in your happier days."

"Dear little woman! It is hard, but it is just. I don't deserve any kindness from you, and so I accept the inevitable with as good grace as I may. But, Con! Con! why were you in such haste to marry? We might have been so happy, you and I. Now, in all the world I stand alone."

She would not heed the reproach his tone conveyed, but with her head upon his breast questioned:

"What will you do?"

"I am in treaty for a situation as secretary to a company. In two days from now I shall know if I am the successful candidate; if I am not, the river must be my refuge."

"No, no! Whilst I have plenty you shall not want. But—but, Will—forgive me—how shall you manage about testimonials, and what if you should be recognised?"

"I have changed a great deal in three years, and it is easy to augment my disguise—a pair of spectacles will work wonders. As for testimonials, I had to buy them; that isn't a difficult matter when one knows where to apply."

"But, Will; oh, my dear Will, it is wrong!" she said, with a sigh.

"I don't intend to starve," he answered, almost sullenly; "and who would employ me without a character. It is of no use to strain at a gnat, when necessity calls on you to swallow a camel."

"Poor Will! And, oh! have you any money?"

"A little. Oh, never fear for me; I am all right."

"But you cannot live on air, and even if you get this situation, you will not receive any salary for at least a week. You must meet me here to-morrow at the same time and place as now, and I will bring you twenty pounds. Not a word—I can very well spare it, and I shall have the consolation of knowing you are not destitute."

"You are an angel, Con, but remember, I only accept it as a loan, and on condition that it involves you in no trouble with your husband. I am not so utterly selfish as to win comfort at your expense."

"I am perfectly safe; Mark is so very, very generous to me; and now, Will, I must go. I dare not risk discovery. God bless and keep you; dear, and bring you to happier times. Her arms were about his neck; then, her sweet face was pressed to his; and Abigail, knowing all it was necessary to know for the carrying out of her plot, glided softly away. Honestly she believed the worst of Connie Endersby, and it was good to know she could gratify her hate by exposing the little traitress. Mark's pride was not hidden from her, or his scorn of anything savouring of deceit. So with a blithe heart she sat down when she reached home, and wrote in a masculine hand:

"If Mr. Endersby would guard his own, and save his honourable name from disgrace, let him look well to his wife's doings. Should he be in the copse beyond the plantation at 11.30 to-morrow morning, he will learn how necessary is the warning of a true friend."

That note was handed to Mark the following morning, just before Connie appeared in the breakfast-room. He read it once with frowning brow, and his first thought was to take it to his wife. Unfortunately for both he did not act upon that thought; then he made as though to thrust it into the fire; but what satisfaction would that bring? Should he not remember the written words all his life long, and could he ever trust Connie "all in all" whilst they lingered in his mind? He could not go and boldly accuse her of falsehood; it was not in the man to be brutal to any woman; and then he so loved her, he felt it would almost kill him if he saw a dawning look of fear and shame in her dark eyes.

Obviously, there was only one course to pursue; he must follow his anonymous correspondent's advice, and then, if—God help him—he found his darling false, he must think out in silence and sorrow what was best to do. If, on the contrary, this story was all a fabrication, he would never rest until he had discovered and exposed the writer.

Presently Connie came down; it struck coldly upon him that she had a worn and hunted look, and he did not guess how much his frigid manner had to do with the change apparent in her.

"Will you drive with me into Rayensthorpe, to-day," he asked, carefully avoiding meeting her eyes. "We could start at eleven."

There was a scarcely perceptible pause before she replied:

"If you do not greatly object, I would prefer remaining at home; or we could go later on if it would suit you to do so."

"It would not," he answered, icily; for surely this was in part a confirmation of the story he had heard; never before had Connie found it irksome or inconvenient to share his pleasures. In an access of great bitterness, he buried himself apparently in his newspaper; but all the while he was watching her from behind it, and he saw her face flush and quiver, then grow white again with pain, and, perhaps, fear of detection, and the man's strong heart quailed within him.

Breakfast being ended, he went out, but at the door Connie stayed his passage, asking pathetically:

"Are you angry with me, Mark? Do not you remember you have not kissed me good-bye?"

He felt like a veritable Judas as he turned and touched her brow with his lips, and the thought that it might be for the last time made his mute caress solemn as the farewell to the dead. It left a chill upon Connie, and it was very wearily that she went to her room to prepare for her walk. She little guessed as she entered the copse that Mark was already there, hating himself for the part he was playing, and yet bent upon satisfying himself as to her loyalty.

Slowly she made her way towards the meeting place, all unconscious that the great holly which yesterday had screened Abigail now sheltered her husband. He set his teeth hard as she went by, and a bitter oath rose to his lips when he saw a man's figure advancing in the opposite direction.

So it was true. Ah! what a fool he had been to marry an actress! What a fool to be deceived by her gentle ways and sweet, pale face! In his honest love he had asked nothing of her past, all he knew was that she was an orphan and friendless. His heavy eyes rested a moment on the little, small form, clasped close in the stranger's embrace; he saw her lift her face to his and kiss him with the kiss of love, and the light went out of his life, his heart lay dead within his breast.

False! well, it was best he should know her as she was; but what should hinder him from slaying her lover before her very eyes? What vengeance was not his by right?

Then a sick scorn of himself seized him. Let her go. Was she worth a tear, was she worth a thought? A thousand times no! But then, because he loved her, and she had borne his name, he could not put her to open shame. There must be no scandal. They would simply part, each going a separate way.

He lifted himself erect then, but his face was grey with anguish, and his eyes were haggard. Quietly he made his way through the plantation and towards the house. The servants looked curiously at him as he passed, but he never heeded their scrutiny. Heart and brain alike were charged with the deadly burthen of his secret. He reached the library, and there he remained for a space of ten minutes; then, going to his own room, he made preparations for a hasty journey. Left the note he had written upon his wife's dressing-table; then, descending, portmanteau in hand, he said to a servant he met upon the stairs: "I am called unexpectedly to town."

tell Mrs. Endersby not to wait luncheon for me."

So he left his home; he almost wished never to enter it again. She had made it so fair, what would it be now without her presence? And, knowing what he did, it was impossible they should live together any more. He met Abigail upon his way to the station.

"Going from home, and alone?" she said, gaily, whilst her eyes noted with keenest satisfaction the pallor and misery of his face; "Mrs. Endersby will be inconsolable."

A bitter smile curved his lips.

"Absence makes the heart grow fonder," he said, with an attempt at gaiety; "I expect to meet with a right royal welcome when I return from town."

"Going to town," soliloquized the woman, as she went slowly towards her home; "that means separation. What next?"

About half-past twelve Connie returned.

"If you please, ma'am," said Cawthrop, "the master said I was to tell you he had to go away unexpected, and you were not to wait lunch for him."

With a strange and wholly unaccountable heart-sinking, Connie went to her room. Mark's note lay upon her table—then he had not forgotten to leave her some farewell message; Mark never forgot anything that might add to her pleasure. So she kissed the note before she opened it, and read—but as she read her face grew pinched and white, a mist was before her eyes, and her breath came in great gasps from between her speechless lips. This is what he had written in the bitterness of his spirit:

"I know all; the disgrace which attaches to you, and the shame you have brought upon my ancient name. Woman, may God forgive you, for I never can! I loved and trusted you with my whole heart, I held you purer than the angels, I would have died to win you life-long happiness, and you deceived me. Knowing all, it is impossible that we should clasp hands again; and, because I would not have your murder on my soul, I leave you. I will make all necessary arrangements with Perkins, my solicitor, and I enclose his address that you may communicate your wishes through him to me. Choose your own place of residence, and, although you have shown me no mercy, be merciful to yourself; because your wretched secret is yet your own, and, despite your sin against me, I will say no word that may seem to cast a slur upon your fair name. God forgive you, and God help me!

"MARK."

Still she stood whilst one might perhaps count ten, then the lithe figure swayed to and fro, the white lids fell to veil the anguish in the sweet eyes; with a low cry of bitterest pain, she reeled forward. "My husband! Oh! my husband!" and with those words she fell prone to the floor, and there, much later, her maid found her, and raised an alarm.

CHAPTER III.

When at last Connie opened her eyes it was to find kind faces bending above her, for she was a favourite with all the household. As consciousness returned she slowly lifted herself on her elbow, and, as slowly remembering Mark's letter, contrived to hide it in the folds of her skirts. Then she said, in the gentlest of voices: "I am afraid I have been very troublesome, and I am sure you have all been very kind. I am grateful to you, but now I would be alone; perhaps I shall sleep—I am so tired. I—I walked too far."

So they left her alone; but, when she had prayed a little, she made no attempt to rest;

rather, she dragged herself towards her Davenport, and, with a great effort, wrote her farewell words to Mark.

"For the love you have given me I thank and bless you; for the shame I brought upon you I pray your pardon. I shall not return to trouble you any more; if the trial which lies before me proves too great for my strength you will hear of my death; on the other hand, if I live you will never receive news of me. It is better so; I have nothing to forgive but all to regret; the fault was mine, so let me endure the blame. Good-bye, and may God send you forgetfulness of me, and freedom from all claim I may have had upon you. Your erring wife,

"CONSTANCE."

This task being ended, she dressed; and, much to the astonishment of the servants, went out, taking nothing with her but her note, which was addressed under cover to Mr. Perkins. This she posted at the station, and then she loitered in the waiting-room, until the Birmingham mail arrived. A young fellow rushed across the platform into an empty third-class compartment. Little Mrs. Endersby followed him, and entering made a swift gesture, as though imploring silence. Not until they had left Clareville a mile behind did he speak; then he asked, in a bewildered tone:

"Connie, what does this mean?"

"It means," she answered, tragically, "that Mark knows all, and has repudiated me. Will, I have no one left me now but you."

"Are you sure there is no mistake? Let us go back together, dear girl, and I will plead your cause; it is not just that you should suffer for my sin. His anger will soon be spent, and no one will be more sorry than himself for the words he has spoken, the undue harshness he has shown."

"No," said Connie, despairingly, "you do not understand him nor his family pride; I suppose, as we never had any notable ancestors, we cannot comprehend how great is the blow I have inflicted upon him. But Will, oh! my dear Will, you must never blame him; he has been so much more good to me than I deserve; I never knew happiness until I knew him. For the rest we have drifted apart; I can never return to him, knowing how hateful my deceit is in his eyes. And so let us work, live, or starve together, and God grant the end may come soon; if you love me you will say amen to that prayer."

He leaned forward and kissed her.

"But for your misery I should rejoice in any accident that gave you back to me," he said, "and in time you will learn to be content, because I swear before high Heaven to labour to make you so."

She forced her poor pale lips to smile; and then she asked:

"You are fully resolved to settle in Birmingham?"

"If I obtain the desired post; I am afraid the life will seem very poor to you after the luxurious one you have been living."

"I crave for nothing but peace and seclusion," she answered, sadly.

The following morning Mark sought out his solicitor; Mr. Perkins, who remembered the sweetness of Connie's face and manner when he had seen her directly after her marriage, greeted the unhappy husband with a strange mixture of reserve and sympathy.

"I have here," he said, "a letter from Mrs. Endersby, which I trust may explain the mystery; for, used as I am to studying the seamy side of nature, I can hardly believe your wife is at fault, however great the evidence may be against her. Read your letter, and tell me what you wish to do in the matter."

Mark carried Connie's note to a distant window, and read it through again and again, as though he could not easily understand its meaning. Then, slowly turning, he said: "This is practically a confession of guilt; all mediation would be vain, and worse than vain. I shall not use it against her, I—the man who loved her—will not bring her to open shame. Draw up the deed I entrusted to you, and then, if ever want stares her in the face, at least she will know where to turn for help."

"And you, what will you do?" questioned the solicitor, pitifully; now his faith a little shaken in Connie's integrity.

"I shall go home again," Mark answered heavily, "I cannot face the bitter truth too soon; and you, Perkins, will faithfully guard my secret and hers."

"You may depend upon me," and then he added to himself, as Mark went slowly away: "Poor fellow, he's dreadfully hard hit, and things look extremely black against Mrs. Endersby, but surely no woman with such pure eyes could play so black a part? Well, I congratulate myself upon my bachelorhood."

Mark went back to Heronhay, braving the curious glances of neighbours and friends, the half-veiled supervision of his servants; and all Clareville was agog with the news that the Squire and his lady had quarrelled.

"Mutual incompatibility of temper" was the cause alleged for the separation, and how it came about no one knew, save Abigail, but it began to be whispered that little Mrs. Endersby had been indiscreet, to say the least of it, and that Mark had in his anger utterly repudiated her.

"Could one wonder?" asked Abigail, scornfully, of those she entertained at high tea. "It was a well-known fact that Connie Carroll was quite of the people, and had been on the stage since her ninth year. Mark had been mad to marry her; but, of course, his remedy lay now in his hands."

But the Squire took no steps to free himself; no one ever heard him speak of Connie either in praise or blame; but the change in his appearance testified only too plainly to the weight of his woe.

He was cruelly aged; the dark hair was threaded now with silver, the once bright eyes were haggard and sunken, and even his voice was changed.

"He is heart-broken," was the common verdict, and Abigail, hearing, set her teeth hard upon her proud underlip, and vowed inwardly that comfort should come to him through herself. She had grown sweet and sympathetic towards him in the past dreary weeks, and one day, when she met him in the house of a mutual friend, she ventured to say:

"How long must we lament the change we see in you? Is all your life to be made dark because of a false woman?"

His weary eyes met hers a moment, then strayed to that little glimpse of copple, where faith and love had died so cruel a death; then he answered, hoarsely,

"That woman was and is my wife; she held my heart in her hand, and when she cast it aside it broke."

"No," said Abigail, sharply, "hearts are made of sterner stuff than that—or mine would long since have broken. Why do you look at me so strangely? Don't you think I, too, have my share of sorrow? But women are braver than men, and I should have thought Mark Endersby too proud to suffer a foolish woman to ruin all his prospects, all his life."

"You do not understand what she was to me, Abigail; or to what depths of woe I have fallen. How should you? There, let it pass; all the talking in the world will not undo the past, or restore my lost happiness and faith to me."

She, leaning nearer, laid one shapely hand upon his arm; her breath came gaspingly, as she said:

"You are young yet, and there are those who love you and are worthy of your love. She has no longer any claim upon you; you may obtain your freedom when you will."

He looked fully into her flashing eyes, and, reading there the truth she no longer cared to conceal, quietly disengaged himself from her hold, saying in a voice so cold it chilled her very heart:

"I am old fashioned in my ideas and principles, and I maintain that it is not well for man to put asunder those whom God has joined together. Neither would I offer any woman, even could I trust her, the semblance of a love which would be mockery to her and shame to me. Only her death can set me free, and I wish to God she had died before she so sorely sinned against herself and me."

Abigail stood white and shivering beside him, for years and years she had striven to win his love, and how useless that striving had been she now for the first time realized. Once, twice, she essayed to speak, but as often her pale lips refused to do her bidding. Then, with a mighty effort, she controlled herself sufficiently to say:

"Better women than Constance Endersby would have given their lives just to feel for one blissful month that the love she trampled under foot was theirs. Oh! with all my heart I pray she may suffer as she deserves to suffer; that sooner or later this ill-starred passion of yours shall die the death it should have died months ago!"

She was magnificent in her wrath and pain; her beauty had never taken such a form in his long experience of her; so might Cleopatra have looked and spoken when she believed herself forgotten of Anthony for Octavia; but it repelled him.

"We will agree to forget this conversation," he answered, wearily, "but first, let me say, that despite her sin against me, and the heavy load of dishonour and despised love I must bear all my life through, I never can forget what once she was to me, or take another woman in her place," and then, before she could answer, he left her side, and she saw him mingling with the other guests.

She sank down upon a seat, her white hands clenched in the folds of her silken gown. She had humbled herself and for naught; she had allowed him to see into the inmost recesses of her heart, and the knowledge that he despised her for this lack of womanly pride was worse than death to her.

She had loved him so long, so long!—ever since she had been a tall girl of seventeen, and she had suffered so sorely. She could not, she would not give up all hope yet of winning him; and yet—and yet—what ground had she for hope? She went home that night with an awful sense of defeat weighing upon her, and a heart full of wrath against a world which, fair to others, was not fair to her.

And to all Mark's inquiries concerning his wife no answer came. It was as though the grave had swallowed her up. The months came and went, the seasons changed, but no change came into his darkened life. Sometimes he repented him of his hastiness, thinking, after all, Connie might have been able to explain if she would, but when he read her note again he could come to no other conclusion than his early one. But deep down in his heart he pitied her. Perhaps her early training had been bad; it may have been that she had suffered poverty and hardship, until she grew covetous of riches and position, and thought that they would compensate her for the loss of love;

and it may be this stranger was the lover of her childhood and youth. He—Mark—would know him again should they chance to meet, and with him he would have his reckoning.

He now carefully avoided Abigail on every possible occasion, although when they did meet her manner gave not the least hint of any embarrassment, or of a warmer feeling than that of friendship. At Clareville, little Mrs. Endersby was all but forgotten; even the gossips ceased to tell her story to new arrivals, and her fate was wholly shrouded in mystery.

Once it chanced that business took Mark to Birmingham, and there was scarcely a street or lane he left unexplored in his vain search for Connie. He could not bear to think that, while he lived in luxury, she might even need the bare necessities of life; no sin of hers could make him forget that from a world of women he had chosen her for his wife. He had traced her to the dingy, factory-ridden city; but beyond the fact that she had reached there safely he could learn nothing. Still he loitered at his hotel; and one day he saw before him a familiar figure. He was quite sure that the man in advance was the stranger he had seen with Connie, and he hastened after him. But at a street corner he paused to look round, and by the start he gave, Mark felt the recognition was mutual. Then, just when he hoped that he was about to receive some news of his wife, the man doubled, and was lost to him in the crowd. And, though he lingered many days, he saw no more of him, nor could he discover the least clue to Connie's hiding place.

Then he went to town, but the manager of "The Lysart" told him that Miss Carroll had never applied for a re-engagement, and he did not really know if she still lived. That question at least was assured on his return to Heronhay, where he found a letter awaiting him; and despite all that had come and gone, his heart leapt up within him as he recognised the delicate handwriting of his wife. With fingers that trembled so they could hardly perform their duty, he tore open the envelope, and drawing out the enclosure read:

"My beloved,—I have heard that of late you were in Birmingham, and I would have given all the remainder of my poor life but to have seen you once again; but that can never be, and it is perhaps cruel and foolish to recall myself so forcibly to your mind. But I could not resist the temptation assailing me to send you some message of my enduring love. God bless you and keep you, must ever be the prayer of your loving wife,
"CONNIE."

This was not the letter of a guilty woman. What did it all mean? Had there been some grievous mistake which could easily have been remedied had he only been more patient? And, then, as he thought of that scene in the corpse, of Connie lying in the stranger's warm embrace, he hardened his heart, and, tossing aside her letter, he gave himself up to bitterest reflections. He made one last attempt, however, to discover her whereabouts, but, finding it vain, he gave up all hope, and settled down despairingly in the house she once had made so glad.

Her rooms were fast closed; as she left them so they remained, no one being allowed to enter them. The dust gathered thick upon the blue and silver hangings; the dainty trifles she had prized were almost worthless now through long neglect, and in the crystal vases the dead daffodils hung their faded heads. The last book she had read lay open upon a little table, and she

had faintly marked the last verse on the page:

"Lie still, lie still, my breaking heart;
My silent heart, lie still and break—
Life and the world, and mine own self,
are changed
For a dream's sake."

Had she any idea when she read those words of the separation and misery which were to ensue?

With a groan he had turned away from what had once seemed a sanctuary to him, and locking the doors, threw the keys away, lest he should be tempted once again to enter, and so waken his woe to keener life. Why should he remember her, the woman who had never deserved his love and trust; whose foul sin had stained his ancient name, and made his life a burden almost too heavy to be borne? She was worse than dead to him—oh, immeasurably worse. By her own evil deed she had dug a gulf between them which nothing could ever bridge over! She was a creature for all good women to avoid. Oh! better—far better that he had seen her lying with her sweet eyes closed for ever to the blessed light of day, with white roses on her quiet breast and the perfect majesty of death upon her silent face. Then, though he must have gone mourning for her all his days, and his life must, at best, have been a broken one, his heart would not have been filled with bitterness and despair; because, once again, in a fairer home, he and she would stand together in the clear light of Heaven's own love.

And whilst he dwelt broodingly over his grief and dishonour, Will and his companion by means of the forged character had settled at Birmingham, where he, at least, had succeeded beyond his highest hopes. He had obtained the post he coveted, his employers none the worse for that deceit. He was honestly determined to live down the past, and he had no fear of recognition from the police authorities; he was so changed, both really and artificially, that it would have taken a very clever man indeed to guess he was the convict who had so daringly escaped. The once golden hair was black now, and the fair skin dyed a rich olive. Fortunately, this was not at variance with his dark brown eyes; and, as the result of rheumatic fever, contracted during his homeless state, he walked with a somewhat marked limp.

In the name of William Thaxter he entered upon his duties, and as William Thaxter he secured apartments for himself and Connie, whom he described as his sister, and wife of a sea captain. She went by the name of Mrs. Lester.

In silence and sorrow she settled down to her new life. She was very ailing, and there were times when, looking at her, Will felt a queer lump rise in his throat as he thought that soon he must lose her, the only friend he could call his own. Then her baby was born, and for a while it was thought that she must die; but, perhaps, the very knowledge of her child's friendless and helpless condition helped to save her life; for she crept back from the gates of death, and slowly, very slowly, recovered something of her old strength and likeness.

"Will," she said, one day, "I want to help you; it is not right that baby and I should be such a burden to you, and one day you may want to marry."

"I do not consider you a burden; and what man with a secret like mine dare ask any woman to share his life; you forget, discovery might ensue any moment. There," as a shadow crossed her face, "let us agree

to forget the past, and let me hear no more foolish talk about your being a burden."

"But, Will, I must speak, and I must work. Whilst I lie here, I fall to thinking, thinking, thinking, until I am half-mad with pain and longing. You are so good, so very good to me; but, dead, no one can ever be quite what he was to me, and I want to forget a little if I can, and in work there lies my only hope."

"You are not strong enough to return to the stage, and that in itself would be risky."

"I never thought of doing so; it would make him very angry; he had a great many prejudices to overcome before he could resolve to marry an actress. I wonder why the world is so cruel to us; we are not worse, I think, than other women. Then again, Will, I never should be a success; I have not enough talent; so I thought if I could only establish a day school, I might, perhaps, do very well. I spoke to Mrs. Fry about it yesterday, and she was very hopeful."

"So you consulted the landlady in preference to me?"

"You are not angry? I knew you would object at first; and I thought her support would be pleasant. You see, I was always a moral coward. She has promised that her three grand children shall be among my first scholars."

"I am afraid you will find it very arduous work, but you must please yourself; if it is too great a strain upon you, I shall insist that you discontinue it."

"And I agree to that; I owe so much to you and little Mark."

So Connie made her venture, and was more successful than she had ever dared to hope. Mrs. Fry had enlisted the sympathies of several of her friends, and as there were many parents who objected to the School Board, the little school grew and flourished, so that at the close of two years Connie felt proudly she was a self-supporting woman. There, too, her pupils adored her, and the few parents to whom she was known personally pitied her because the sailor husband had never returned; and it was not really known whether he had deserted her or was lost at sea.

But another cruel blow yet awaited Connie; she had occasion to go into the city, and it so chanced that Abigail Venne, who was on her way to Clifton, was compelled to wait two hours for her train. Always restless, doubly so now, when all hope of winning Mark was gone, she could not remain in the waiting-room, but, bidding her maid keep watch and ward over her numerous boxes, made her way into the busy streets; when she saw before her a figure that had a familiar look. For a moment she was so startled that she was incapable of speech or movement, and one or two people looked curiously at this tall, stately woman who looked as though about to faint. Then, with passionate scorn of her weakness, she conquered it, and followed in Connie's wake carefully.

Her victim never turned her head, but went on her way; speaking to none, pausing to glance in none of the attractive windows; and Abigail held on her way with hate in her dark heart. She remembered now that through the gossip of the servants it had transpired that when Mark was so long from home he had been mostly at Birmingham, where he believed his wife was hidden; what a fool she had been not to follow in his track!

Presently Connie turned into a side street, consisting mostly of lodging-houses; and pausing at one of these, rang for admission. Abigail drew back into an archway, and watched while Connie passed in, she presently appearing at an open window with a little child in her arms. Then she went

away, and, finding she did not return, Abigail ventured out of her hiding-place.

One swift glance at the windows of the house exactly opposite Connie's residence told her that lodgings were to be obtained. She ran up the steps and rang the bell; being admitted by the obsequious landlady, whose respect was won by the rich clothes she wore. She explained that she was travelling, but an accident compelled her to remain at Birmingham for a few days; could she have apartments for herself and maid? She might require them for only forty-eight hours, but she was quite willing to pay a month's rent in advance.

The woman eagerly closed with the offer, her eyes sparkling greedily as Abigail told out the gold pieces. It was not a part of Miss Venne's programme to be discovered by Connie; who, in alarm, might take to flight; so, begging that a cab might be sent for, she waited with her eyes fixed watchfully on the opposite windows; and, the vehicle arriving, entered swiftly and unseen, and drove back to the station, where she found her maid nearly frantic for the train by which they should have gone had but just started.

"Oh! miss," she cried, "it is not my fault, really; I've been looking everywhere for you, and the train just steamed out as I caught sight of you. I don't know if we can get to Clifton to-night."

"We are not going, Maria; I have changed my mind, and taken apartments here for a few days. When we have made a few purchases we will drive to them; but it will not be necessary to take all our boxes; get those we do not require booked."

And then she went away to the Telegraph Office, and wired to her friends that unforeseen business compelled her to postpone her visit at least for a few days, but she would communicate with them more fully on the morrow.

Then, when dusk had fallen, she and Maria went to their apartments; Connie's blinds were drawn, and nothing further was seen of her that night.

Abigail was up early in the morning, and having despatched her maid, who was unknown to little Mrs. Enderby, being a fresh importation, for papers, she sat down beside the window, and, screening herself behind the tapestry curtains, watched the opposite house with the pertinacity of a detective.

Presently children began to arrive in such numbers that she came to the conclusion that a school was "kept" there; but throughout the morning she saw no least sign of Connie; and the day went by drearily enough. Then came evening, and with it her reward; the man she had seen in the cope with her rival knocked, and was admitted by her.

Abigail drew her breath sharply, but controlled herself, for at this moment the landlady entered with a letter.

"I have been watching the houses and the passers-by, for want of better amusement," she said, graciously; "I suppose my journey tired me, for I have had no inclination to go out to-day. By the way, Mrs. Nevitt, who is that extremely nice-looking lady I saw at the door just now?"

"Oh! that is Mrs. Lester, ma'am; and she's a widow. I've heard say her husband was a sea-captain, but I don't know how true it is, because, you see, I never associate with her landlady—she's chapel and I'm church. That gentleman you saw come in is her brother, Mr. Thaxter, and he's wonderful fond of her and her little boy, which was born after she came here. He's a clerk, or something of the kind, and she keeps school."

Miss Venne dismissed the subject as though it had no further interest for her; but she

never relaxed her watch on Number Twenty; and on Saturday she saw Connie go out accompanied by her child. She put on her bonnet hastily, and, much to Mrs. Nevitt's surprise, crossed the road, and was admitted by Mrs. Fry herself.

"I have come on a painful errand," she said, with a commiserating look at the landlady; "from all that I have heard of you I am convinced you are a most respectable and meritorious person, and are wholly unaware of the true character of two of your lodgers at least—Mr. Thaxter and the self-styled Mrs. Lester."

"Oh! I beg your pardon, ma'am; I couldn't believe ill of either. They're lodged with me a long time now, and I've got quite to like them. She's as nice a lady as ever stopped, and no one could be more fond of her than her brother."

"Her brother," in accents of finest scorn, "that man is not her brother. She is a worthless, shameless woman, who has broken her husband's heart, and ruined his home. She is unfit to breathe the same air with women like yourself. Do I not know, when it was I who brought home her guilt to her? She could not face the dreadful truth, and fled with the man you call Thaxter. That is more than two years ago, and I lost all trace of her; until coming by accident to lodge with Mrs. Nevitt, I saw her pass in here; and I was indignant that she should shelter herself beneath an honest roof."

Mrs. Fry looked fearful; she had been so honestly fond of Connie and her baby; but she was angry, too; and she wondered what the elders of her chapel would say, should they learn this evil story. In an instant her mind was made up. It would be a distasteful loss to her, but her lodgers should go. Unfortunately, Will always paid a fortnight in advance, and she could not afford to return the money; they must stay on, until then.

Without knowing it, too, she was a Pharisee, one of those ready to cast the first stone at a sinner, saying as she did so, "Let us be; let us be the just punishment for the crimes she has fallen, let no man or woman stretch out a hand to lift her from the mire."

She looked up with a flash in her eyes. "They shall go at the end of the fortnight. If this story is true; as a guarantee of good faith you will tell me your name?"

"I am called Miss Venne," answered Abigail, who cared very little even if Connie learned the part she played. "Tell me why you will countenance such people for a moment, after you have learned the truth? Is it because, like myself, they have repaid you? Yes? Allow me to free you from your painful position."

And, smiling a little ironically over Mrs. Fry's remonstrance, she inquired the sum necessary to make good the other's loss, and generously supplementing it, departed with a light heart, because she would now be witness to Connie's ignominious eviction.

After a lengthened absence Connie returned home, being quickly followed by Will; and then, feeling all further concealment was unnecessary, Abigail swept aside the curtains, and stood, a superb figure, before the open window.

Meanwhile Mrs. Fry followed her lodgers upstairs, and, without knocking, entered.

"I must beg you," she said, "to leave my house to-night; I do not harbour shameless men and women; I am a respectable person, and I mean to keep my house respectable. There's your fortnight's rent, and it's glad I am to be able to give it you. And now, Mrs. Lester, Thaxter, or whatever you may choose to call yourself, you had best be quick in getting your things together, or I'll feel myself obliged to put them out."

Connie had started to her feet, clutching

her child close to her breast; and now she panted out:

"Mrs. Fry, are you mad that you insult us thus? Off what do you accuse me?"

"Oh! a guilty conscience needs no accuser, and it's not for me to tell you all that you are!"

"Silence, woman! I trust Will, in a white fury, 'How dare you address such language to Mrs. Lester! I will make you prove your hideous statements; I will call in the police to prevent this illegalousting from our lodgings!'"

"Well, sir, if you like you may; I have nothing to fear. It's best known to yourself if you can say the same with truth!"

Connie clung to him in wildst fright, not knowing how much Mrs. Fry had letted of the party.

"Oh! deus go, Will! let us leave this dreadful woman! Deare Will, as his chin sunk in his breast, "do not mind what she says, only come away!"

And his tongue was tied with the awful recollection of that life from which he had escaped, from which he must almost surely return; he ventured to alibi grievances in any court of justice; some minion of the law would recognise and discover him; lawyers have such a way of working out one's most hidden secrets, and how could he well account for the whole of his life?

So, with a muttered curse, he thrust back the money which Mrs. Fry had placed before him.

"Keep it," he said; "whatever we may be, we have not fallen so low as to accept your charity. Now, you will help Mrs. Lester to pack, and under my supervision, I do not care to have her insulted a second time by you; then you will call a cab, and we will leave you to the enjoyment of your eminently respectable and Pharisaical establishment."

Something in his tone and look cowed the woman; and she went to do his bidding, keeping close by throughout. But Connie would accept nothing from her hands; coldly and proudly she disclaimed assistance in packing little Mark's belongings.

"So cruel a woman," she said, "shall touch nothing belonging to any boy; it would be an ill omen to him."

And so they took their ignominious departure; as she stepped into the cab, some instinct compelled Connie to glance at the opposite windows, and she saw the handsome, fiendish face of Abigail smiling down upon her.

"Look, Will, it is my enemy, Abigail Vorne! I might have traced her work in this."

And Will looked, but so fleeting was the glimpse he caught of the smiling woman that he would have found it very difficult to recognise her should they chance to meet again.

And now arose the question where they should lodge that night; and presently they elicited from the cabman that his "governor" had a couple of spare rooms which they could have by paying a deposit, "and you ain't obliged to stop if they don't suit," said cabby, "you can just be keeping a look-out for others."

They were glad of any shelter, for little Mark was fractious; and Connie was half dead with shame and pain; and not all Will's loving words could rouse her from her depression.

Of course her school was lost, and she felt that even had she the heart to establish another she should never succeed, because the fear of recognition by some of Mrs. Fry's friends would be ever before her.

They found new lodgings with quiet people, but Connie never could be persuaded to go out; she had a nervous horror of the noisy streets, and daily she grew so frail and anxious that Will was alarmed for her.

"Oh! let us get away," she cried one day, in an almost hysterical fashion; "I cannot

bear to remain here longer; one day they will find you and take you from us, and that will break my heart."

He soothed her as best he might, promising that he would endeavour to find a situation in some other place; for indeed, although he showed nothing of this, he was anxious, too, for his own safety. Doubly anxious now that he only stood between Connie, her boy, and poverty.

"I have paid the full penalty of my crime," he thought, "now I will go free; I never will be taken alive! But my poor girl, my poor girl, what an awful plight I have been upon your life! May Heaven pardon me for what I can but condemn!"

But Connie, in her tender woman's love, never upbraided him with the past.

CHAPTER IV.

It now became Will's constant endeavour to fulfil his promise to Connie, and he was more successful than he believed it possible to be. Surely his lucky star was in the ascendant, when he applied for and obtained the post of secretary to a flourishing railway company in London, provided that his testimonials were without flaw. His present employers were pleased to write most favourably of him—his talents and his personal character—so that in less than two months after Abigail's cowardly blow he had removed his little family to town. But so great had been Connie's scare, that he soon saw she would have no rest so long as they remained in England, and so he spoke of emigrating. She listened with a faint heart, because whole seas must roll between Mark and herself if their plans took form and shape; but she raised no objection, only she said, wistfully:

"You will be giving up a great deal for me—a certainty for an uncertainty."

"We will not talk about that. I am not afraid of work, only, dear, you must have patience, and wait until I have saved the necessary funds. In a year, at the most, we might start."

So long as he lived, Will never forgot those weary months of waiting, when daily Connie seemed to grow more weak and frail; when from being swift of foot she could scarcely crawl about the pretty flat he had engaged for her at Kensington.

Oh for a moderate share of this world's goods! not for himself, but for this woman who had borne all so bravely for his sake, who for his sake, was an outcast and an alien from her home! How he pinched and scraped, how he defied himself every luxury and many necessities, in order to hasten the hour of their departure; and at the close of the third year, from Connie's flight he felt that the hour had at last come. He sent in his resignation, which was accepted with regret by his employers, for he had proved himself trusty and capable; it would be hard to supply his place. Then he made his way to a shipping office, afterwards turning homeward with a thoughtful face. He found Connie lying upon a couch, drawn up before a window; she was worn with illness and trouble; but her eyes were gentle as ever, and the smile which lit up her pale face as she welcomed him was full of tenderness.

"Well, Con," he said, cheerfully, "it is all settled; I have sent in my resignation, and taken out berths in the *Iturra*, which sails for Brisbane in a month. Out there we shall be free from this haunting dread; and the voyage will quite set you up, you poor, pale little woman. You are only a ghost of your old self; but we mean to remedy

that. It makes a coward of me to see you suffer so cruelly; and to know that I am the cause of it all."

"Poor old Will," she answered, gently, "I wish you would resolve to put that thought from you. See"—trying to draw him to lighter subjects—"see what a pretty coat I have been making for little Mark, in view of our journey. Did you suppose I was such a very clever modiste? Out there I may be able to turn my newly discovered talent to some use. I should not like to keep school again."

She was talking quickly. Will thought, and thought rightly, that she did so in the fear that her courage would fail her, and his own face darkened.

"I ought never to have discovered myself to you," he said. "I was a brute to do it." One white hand stole out to caress his.

"Won't you ever cease grieving for me? There, do not speak of the past; it is for the future we must prepare."

"Yes, and the time is so short, it does not leave us very much leisure, Con, but I think we shall manage to wind up our affairs satisfactorily; they are not very complicated. And over in a new land we will begin a new and, I trust, a happier life."

Then, suddenly, she put up her white hands to hide her whiter face, and burst into the weak tears of one long sick. The child continued his play, but the man gathered her into his arms, and in his eyes there was a look of renunciation.

"What is it, Connie? Is it too great a wrench for you to leave England and him?"

"Don't mind me," she sobbed; "I am weak and foolish. At times it seems to me that I must die of my pain and longing. I am not ungrateful to you, or unmindful of my child; but—but—oh, Will, Will! it breaks my heart to think I shall never see him any more."

"It puzzles me," said Will, "why women should be so loyal to men who treat them so ill; after all, Con, yours was a very venial error, though he punished it so severely—and yet you love him."

"He is my husband, and the father of my child," she said, simply. Then suddenly she clung about him, crying, "Tell me what to do? Must I give up my boy? Must I go away, and never see him through all the years that may remain to me? It is not right; it is not just that I should rob him of his heritage, and leave his father desolate. Do not you think that because once Mark loved me he will love our boy—he, at least, has not sinned against him. I will go with you, dear; I never will leave you. But for little Mark, I crave something brighter and better than that which lies before us."

Will was very quiet for a while, then he said, slowly:

"You are right, Con; the lad must not lose his birthright, and, however harsh his father may have been, it does not justify us in keeping his birth a secret from him. In some way, dear, I will contrive to acquaint him with it, and then we can only await his decision."

She shivered through all her slender frame, then looking up with a wan smile, said:

"Whatever that decision is, I mean to abide by it; even though it break my heart. God knows, life has not been so sweet to me that I should fear death."

The next morning, Will went to her; never had she looked so white and frail. His heart sank as his eyes rested upon the wasted form, and faded face, but he spoke cheerfully enough.

"I have so much to do to-day," he said, "that I fear I shall be unable to return home

until quite late; but so long as you have Mark to amuse you, you will not miss me very much, and I can rely upon Mrs. Burling to care for you."

"I shall miss you; I always do," Connie answered, with her faint smile. "You are a lost to yourself; but business must come before pleasure, always. Tell me at what hour you expect to return."

"Certainly not before ten. Can you wait up for me? And, Con, I would like you to wear that pretty new gown of yours, it gives those poor, pale cheeks just the colour they need. It hurts me to see you so wan and white."

"Oh, I'll certainly wait up for you, and as certainly wear my pink gown. You will be so long away that I must make quite a festival of your return. Are you going, dear? Well, then, good-bye—the day will be very long without you."

And when he had gone she called her child to her side, and folding him close to her breast, sobbed out:

"My dear one, my pretty one! Must I give you up? Must I feel that you are lost to me for ever, and that in time you may learn even to loathe my memory? My baby! my baby! there is no woman on earth more wretched than your mother. There will be none to love you as I, who now put you away, love you;" and then, as little Mark, frightened by her tears, set up a dolorous howl, she tried to laugh, and drawing his curly head down until it nestled amongst the pillows of her couch, controlled herself sufficiently to sing him to sleep with a tender little lullaby.

As he slept she bent and kissed him, not with the passionate abandonment of one who soon must lose him, but with a quiet despair that might have melted a heart of stone. Then she knelt and prayed for him, asking that in the new life to which she was now fully resolved to consign him, all the goodliest and gladdest things of earth might be his; that in mercy to her memory, Mark would keep her sin hidden from him, and teach him to think of her as one long dead, but who, until death came to her, had loved him from the inmost depths of her sad heart.

Meanwhile Will had taken a ticket for Clareville. It was borne so persistently upon him now that Connie was dying from sheer longing for the sight of Mark's face and the touch of his hand; that he would be guilty of her murder if he did not make some effort to effect a reconciliation between Mark and herself. She had suffered so much because of him that he now braced himself up to meet the inevitable parting with her; being fully resolved that neither she nor her child should sail with him for Brisbane, if in any way Mark would condone her sin.

He reached Clareville a little after noon, and on his way to Heronhaye he passed a tall, handsome woman, who regarded him with such mingled fear and dismay that he turned to look at her. She was standing in the middle of the road, still with that strange expression on her face, and as he halted she moved towards him, and by a gesture desired him to remain. Wondering not a little at the peculiarity of her manner, he obeyed, and, when she had joined him, asked courteously:

"What is your pleasure, madam?"

"I want to know what you are doing here?"

The question was so strange, so different to anything he had expected, that Will with difficulty refrained from laughter; then he said:

"Pardon me, madam, if I cannot understand your interest in so great a stranger as myself; and if, not being of a communicative turn, I refuse to gratify your curiosity."

Her face grew pale with anger as she answered:

"You are not a stranger to me; I have seen you twice before; once when you met Mrs. Enderaby in the copse, and again when you were detected and ignominiously ejected from a middle-class lodging house in Birmingham. You are William Thaxter!"

A sudden knowledge of her identity flashed upon him; and his face grew very dark as he said:

"And you are Abigail Venne."

"Yes," she answered, "I am she; and I warn you that that it will be vain to go to Heronhaye; its master hates the memory of the woman who brought disgrace upon him and his home; he would have scant mercy upon the partner of her flight. It is useless to plead with him for pardon or pecuniary assistance. Be warned in time, and return while you may do so."

"Your advice, Miss Venne, is not disinterested; consequently I should be foolish to accept it. I know it was through your instrumentality that we suffered indignity at Birmingham; I would like to know now what part you played in separating Mark Enderaby from his wife."

The colour mounted to the handsome, cruel face; a moment she wavered, then she said, boldly:

"I did inform Mrs. Fry of your antecedents and hers; and it was I who apprised Mark Enderaby of your meetings in the copse."

A new light was thrown upon the Squire's conduct; it flashed upon Will that he was yet ignorant of the true story; that he might even believe his wife unfaithful to him.

"I do not ask your motive for conduct alike unworthy a Christian and a woman; it is plain to me you loved Mark Enderaby yourself, and in revenge for his indifference you determined to spoil his happiness."

She bit her lip, and trembled a moment with passion and shame; then she said, defiantly:

"I loved him, yes; and I found her unworthy of him; I hoped, when he learned the truth concerning her, he would call the law to his aid; and if he were once free I was confident of my own ultimate victory. It seemed incredible to me that a man of his stamp could ever condone or palliate so great a crime as hers against him."

"It must have been a sore disappointment to you," sneered Will, "that Mr. Enderaby remained inactive in the matter. But for your further encouragement allow me to say that, whatever was the nature of Mrs. Enderaby's offence, it was not of a kind that could set him free, or even entitle him to a separation. You have lost honour and womanliness, have sinned all in vain; and I am glad to think that in that reflection alone you will find your greatest punishment."

Then, when he would have left her, she laid her hands forcibly upon him; and with her white fierce face advanced to his, gasped rather than said,

"And you are not her lover?"

He laughed scornfully.

"You will later on learn who and what I am; until then I leave you to your own conjectures."

He shook off her hands almost roughly, and left her standing there, motionless and rigid; whilst from her pale lips fell the words:

"Not false! not false! but loving him, and so they will be united; together they will laugh at my love, whilst they hate my treachery. What shall I do? what shall I do?"

CHAPTER V.

In a very tumult of feeling Will walked boldly to Heronhaye. If it should be as he thought and believed, then there was every

excuse for Mark's subsequent conduct; and that handsome, evil woman had been the cause of all their misery; he almost cursed her as he remembered that, and in his mind resolved to spare her nothing in the recital of his story to Mark.

To the servant who admitted him he gave no name; but, merely stating that important business brought him to Heronhaye and he could not leave without seeing the Squire, was ushered at once into the library. There he waited long, and was at perfect liberty to examine all the curios and pictures the place contained.

It touched him to see that Connie's portrait still hung opposite the Squire's table, and that there were still some indications of a woman's presence. Well, Heaven be thanked that he had been given strength to renounce happiness for himself; and perhaps had placed in his hands the task of righting a great wrong—a wrong done not less to Mark than to Connie.

He began to feel very pitiful towards his brother-in-law; no wonder if, believing Connie guilty of faithlessness, he had driven her away; the wonder was that he loved her still, and hid her supposed sin from the world.

At length he heard Mark's step in the hall, and turning, confronted him. As Enderaby's eyes rested upon him a sudden hatred flashed into their depths, and his haggard face took life and colour.

"You villain!" he cried, "how dare you enter the home you have ruined! If you are the bearer of any message from my wife I refuse to hear it from your lips; look what you have made me. Out of my sight, or I shall murder you."

And then in his fury he sprang upon his visitor, clutching him by the throat. But Will was the stronger of the two, for Mark was much wasted and weakened by sorrow, and by a dexterous movement he flung him aside.

"You fool!" he said; "at least I did not sin against you; and I come now on Connie's behalf. Listen; I will be heard; unless you will open your arms to her she will leave England for ever in the course of a month. It is strange her affection should outlive such harshness as yours, but truth is stranger than fiction; and seeing that she is dying for love of you, I came in my sister's cause—"

"Your sister's!" Mark interrupted with a shout; "I—I—Oh! Heaven! are you lying to me?"

"Are you mad?" asked Will, impatiently. "In your last letter to her, you acknowledged you knew all the shame which, through me, had fallen upon her, and her deceit, as you were pleased to call her suppression of my crime."

"I am at sea," said Mark, bewilderedly. "I—oh, may God forgive me—I believed you were an old lover, for whose sake she was false to her marriage vows."

"Then you were a fool for your pains," rejoined the other. "You had only to look into Connie's eyes to see her pure soul. And all the while you have been playing at cross purposes, she believing you had in some way learned the truth and for my sake had repudiated her. Why, in the name of all that is good, did you not explain?"

Mark made no answer; the knowledge that he had wronged Connie and given her such a bitter cup to drink held him silent; and his visitor guessing this went on:

"All blame is mine; listen to my story. We, Connie and I, were the children of theatrical people; but I had never any aptitude for the stage, so whilst Connie adopted the profession, I entered a merchant's office. My father was then dead, and our little household was maintained mainly by my mother's earnings. Well, she fell ill, and for nine months she lay sick. Connie was

out of an engagement—my salary was all inadequate to meet our wants, and I grew desperate; and in my desperation I became a thief. I honestly intended to restore every penny I had taken to my employer, and for that purpose I engaged in a betting transaction, putting every halfpenny I possessed upon the favourite for the Derby. It came in fourth, and I knew that ruin stared me in the face; it met me two days later, when my employer discovered my embezzlement. I was arrested, tried, convicted, and sentenced to seven years' penal servitude; but I escaped, and a report was spread that my dead body had been found. I did not, of course, contradict that, and I never should have revealed myself to Connie had I guessed what would follow. But I sorely needed help, and she gave it generously. Then came your supposed discovery of me and my crime; and Connie confessed that she had not even told you of my existence. Fully believing that your love for her was dead, she joined me, and we went to Birmingham, where we lived under assumed names, and there, six months later, her child was born."

"Connie's child!" cried Mark, in amazement, he had forgotten that an heir might be born to him, and then he added, hoarsely: "Go on with your story, let me know the full extent of my folly. Oh, my poor girl! oh, my poor girl!" and he never once questioned the truth of Will's statement. The scales had fallen from his eyes, and he wondered how he could have been so blind as to doubt his wife's purity.

"Well," continued Will, "I obtained a situation through forged testimonials—there was no other course left open to me—see, I am hiding nothing from you now—I must live, and I had to think of Connie, too. There, at Birmingham, I retrieved my character; I was an honest man again, liked and respected by my associates; and the only time I had fear of discovery was when I saw you on the street; and believing the quality of your mercy to be somewhat strained, I decided to evade you. I had no intention of being re-captured; but Connie was always afraid, and after a most unpleasant experience at our lodgings, she became positively morbid, so that I accepted the first situation that offered and brought her up to town. But she has never recovered the shock she received, and so for the past twelve months, I have devoted myself to saving every available penny for the purpose of emigrating. She promised willingly to go with me, but although she never complained, I could see that her heart was slowly breaking with the thought that she should never see you again, and so I determined to plead her cause with you. It is for you to decide what she shall do; for herself she hopes nothing—it is of the boy she thinks, and she will resign him to you at your bidding. What do you say? Her error was a very venial one, and if you will take her back again in all honour and tenderness, I promise, on my part, willingly to efface myself from her life. I owe her much, no man had ever so true and loving a sister—"

"Where is she? Take me to her!" and then for the first time since his childhood, Mark burst into a flood of tears. Oh! how he had wronged her! Could all the service of all his life ever recompense her for the pain she had borne, the shame he had put upon her? She was still his; his own loyal, pure-hearted Connie, who had never had a thought of love for any save himself. He stretched out his hand to Will. "I deserve that you should whip me like a dog," he said, and he flushed as the other did not respond to his advances.

(Continued on page 573.)

HILDRED ELSINORE.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

Things were not going pleasantly at Little Netherton Rectory, Mrs. Elsinore had often in her secret heart regarded Hildred as the one drawback to her happiness, and believed that if only her step-child were dead, and she had her home and husband entirely to herself, things would go on so much better, that even poverty would not press so hardly.

And now she had got her wish; the secret desire of her heart, which she had been ashamed even to acknowledge to herself, much less put into words, was granted. Hildred was dead, and could never again rival her half-sisters in their father's love, and lo! Mrs. Elsinore was forced to confess, her lot, instead of being improved, was far worse than it had been before, and her step-daughter's loss was little short of a calamity.

Little Netherton did not contain any very aristocratic families, or any people of startling refinement, but the inhabitants were simple country folk, with a most remarkable habit of "calling a spade a spade." The farmers' wives had had very little in common with Hildred Elsinore, some of them had thought her fanciful and "odd," one or two had pitied her parents for having such an undomesticated eldest daughter, but they had all seen her grow up amongst them from a little child, they all knew she was gentle, sweet-tempered and patient, and the moment the story of her death got abroad there was a wonderful reaction in her favour, and with one voice everyone declared the girl had been persecuted at home, and that her step-mother had driven her into an engagement so hateful to her that she preferred death to fulfilling it.

Little Netherton people had never taken to Guy Bertram, he had hardly given them the chance, since he never entered a house in the place save the Rectory; they had been rather inclined to call Hildred mercenary and designing when they heard of her splendid prospects; but now all was changed, one told another the poor young lady had just grown whiter and sadder ever since the match was talked of, and no doubt if only she had had one friend to stand by her she would have resisted the persuasions of her parents.

"Well," said Mrs. Gibson, speaking to a parlour full of matrons, who had dropped in to talk of the calamity, "this is the darkest Christmas Eve I ever knew. I don't go to blame that poor girl, it's little kindness she got at home, and I don't doubt she was pretty high distracted, but I've made up my mind on one thing—and so has Gibson—Mrs. Elsinore never darkens my door again; I don't blame the parson so much, a poor feckless man she kept under her thumb, but that woman as surely killed poor Hildred as though she'd drowned her with her own hands."

Mrs. Gibson's words were echoed by all her friends; never had public opinion been so stirred; if the family at the Rectory had not kept at home all Christmas Day and the following Sunday, they would surely have learned how things were going. Mrs. Elsinore considered it "decent" to keep in seclusion for a week after the tragedy, and so it was not until New Year's Day that she went out into the village on her usual rounds of visiting and fault finding. And then a wonderful thing happened. The rector's wife was not given to stand on ceremony, she mostly pushed open the cottage doors and walked in, if the doors were fastened she concluded the inhabitants were out. On this particular day she tried fifteen doors, and not one of them yielded to her efforts;

everyone could not be from home. She felt nonplussed, and crossed the village street to a house where a woman stood at her gate talking to a neighbour, but before Mrs. Elsinore could reach the pair they had separated, each scuttled into her own kitchen, and made fast the door. Enraged at their impertinence, the lady-rector hammered at the unoffending door with her umbrella; she met not the slightest answer. For fully five minutes she continued her efforts, and then had to turn humiliated away.

Meeting the husband of one of the delinquents she told him of his wife's insolence, and demanded an explanation. The man stood his ground bravely; he worked for Farmer Gibson, and knew his master would uphold him in his conduct.

"I don't want to be uncivil, ma'am," he said, quietly; "but we've all made up our minds we're not going to have you in our places any more. We all loved Miss Hildred, ma'am, and seeing you drove her to her death we'd rather have no more to do with you."

Mrs. Elsinore slunk home like a whipped spaniel. Saturday she stayed at home, but the next morning she had recovered her valour, and presented herself, with Martha and Janey, at the Sunday-school at the usual hour.

But they might as well have stayed away, no children presented themselves for instruction. The church was filled as well as usual, and Mr. Elsinore, in a faltering voice, got through the service; but as the family went down the churchyard home, not a creature spoke to them; it was as though by one consent the whole village had decided to send them to Coventry.

"This is monstrous!" cried Mrs. Elsinore to her husband, as they sat at dinner, "Really, Charles, you ought to write to the Bishop."

How old and worn he looked, how sad was the voice which answered:

"I think he will probably write to me, wife; perhaps you have not heard that the churchwardens have sent him an account of—of what has happened, begging that, as my ministrations can no longer be accepted by the people here, he will take steps to remove me."

"Charles!"

"It is quite true, Gibson told me himself on Friday; he came on purpose while you were out; he said he had done his best to dissuade them from writing to the Bishop, but it was of no use."

"But what have we done?"

"In their judgment we persecuted Hildred till we drove her to the sin of suicide."

"But a living is freehold," said Mrs. Elsinore, taking courage, "the Bishop can't send you away."

Her husband shuddered.

"I don't think I should mind. It is dreadful to feel the people hate me, and be sure, wife, Lord Netherton will take their part; Hildred was named after his own daughter, and he took a great interest in her."

Mrs. Elsinore felt subdued, only for a few minutes though, then she started on another tack.

"Thank goodness we owe nothing, and you have a thousand pounds in the bank; would not that be enough to buy the advowson of another living, and then we could snap our fingers at the people here?"

"Such a step would be simony and a sin; besides, I have not a thousand pounds. The money you allude to I shall never touch. I regard it as blood-money—the price of my child's life."

"You have other children," said his wife, angrily; "you should think of them."

"I try to," he answered, gently. "For their sakes, when the Bishop writes, he will have no choice but to write after the churchwardens' letter, I shall beg him to

give me another chance. There are a few years' work left in me yet, and, in London, or some other big town, where people have not time to gossip much about their neighbours, we might live this scandal down."

It was a miserable Sunday. Even the younger children understood the odium in which they were held. Mrs. Elsnore was thankful when they could shut the Rectory door for the night, and feel she need not face the indignant scorn of the congregation again for another week.

She had her own anxieties, poor woman. She knew the price of rent and provisions in London far better than her husband. To bring up eight children there on the income of a curacy would be nearly starvation.

Monday was quiet and uneventful, but on Tuesday afternoon, soon after the arrival of the second post, a startling sound was heard at the Rectory. The beautiful bells of the old church rang a muffled peal. Never before in Mrs. Elsnore's memory had the passing bell sounded without her knowing for whom it was tolled, and a muffled peal—why, such a thing had never been rung since they came to Netherton. The last time, the old sexton said, was for Lady Hildred Carr.

"Impertinence," she cried; "the idea of Budd's daring to do such a thing on his own authority."

Mr. Elsnore did not share her indignation. He was too crushed down, but he met the old man as after the other ringers had dispersed—he was looking up the bellfry, and asked him who was dead.

"It be the Earl, sir," said the sexton, civilly. I got the letter by the second post," and he produced it. "Maybe you'd like to read it."

It was very simple. Addressed to the Sexton of Little Netherton, it began courteously, "Dear sir," and was more of a request than a command.

"Will you kindly ring a muffled peal for my cousin, Lord Netherton, who died on Sunday evening. By his own wish he will be buried abroad, but I will send particulars of the day and hour. I am writing to the caretaker at the castle to ask her to have the house darkened. I shall probably be at Netherton by the end of the week, when I shall gladly defray the cost of my directions."

"Yours truly,

"HUGH TREFUSIS-NETHERTON."

"He'll be the next 'her,' sir," Budd explained. "The poor Earl had neither kith nor kin nearer to him than his cousin, Mrs. Trefusis, and this is her son."

CHAPTER XXIV.

Lord Netherton was dead, and Jim Devenish's last task of love was over. He stood with Hugh Trefusis by the side of the open grave in the English cemetery at Beauville, and then they turned back for a few hours to St. Madeleine, where the elder man had still some business to transact.

Hugh was much attracted by his companion. The grave, thoughtful manner, and said, handsome face, inspired his confidence, and that last evening something induced him to unburden his heart, and tell Mr. Devenish the story of Hildred's flight from home, and his own conviction that Guy Bertram was an impostor. He was not prepared for the effect of his tale upon his listener.

"Is there no end to the harm my rash oath has done?" cried Jim, bitterly. "Captain Trefusis, you need search no further for proofs against the man who persecuted Hildred Elsnore into an engagement with him. I am the Guy Bertram, who was once

Blanche Tempest's lover. I have the betrothal ring I gave her on my finger, and even at this distance of time I could find a dozen people of note in London, who would identify me as the young journalist whom Lady Tempest thought unworthy to be her son-in-law."

Hugh started.

"Thank Heaven," he said, simply. "I have always felt my Hildred would never be at peace while that man wandered about the world unpunished. What I feared was that he had stolen the name and identity of a dead friend, and so we could never unmask him."

Jim took an official-looking paper from his pocket; it was the dividend warrant of an English railway, and it was made out in the name of Guy Bertram.

"The little my father could leave me was invested in this stock. I have still kept my own name in my pecuniary transactions, though for years, now, I have only known myself socially as Jim Devenish. Seven years ago—when I was, as he thought, dying—my dearest friend deserted me, and stole the leather bag containing my ready money; with that he stole also my poor girl's picture and letters. I should say he had probably personated me. You see, I never dreamed Lady Tempest would leave me anything."

"But"—Hugh was almost too much perplexed to speak plainly—"he must be a scoundrel."

"Claude Maitland had the makings of a scoundrel seven years ago; I don't suppose time has improved him. I suppose you know he is here now."

"Whatever for?"

"His wife is here—a young girl, almost a child; the daughter of the good woman you saw at Lord Netherton's death-bed."

"But he can't have a wife; he was engaged to Hildred."

It was Jim's turn to be story-teller now. He related the facts of Nan's illness and her lover's opportune arrival, and his own conviction that this Claude Maitland, and none other, had personated Guy Bertram at Copsleigh."

"Well, he must be a consummate actor. Do you know, I was actually his guest when a kind old doctor came half the way from London to ask for Claude Maitland's address? If you'll believe me, Mr. Devenish, that villain listened to the tale of his own sweetheart's dangerous illness, and actually offered money to assist her. When the doctor had gone, he told me the story of Claude Maitland's offences; he must have been speaking of himself."

"I think I can understand it," said the older man, slowly; "he hated poverty above all else; seeing a reward offered for Guy Bertram's address, and believing me dead, you must remember he had left me dying in an Australian bush, he thought he might as well personate me. By blackening his friend Claude Maitland's character to the lawyers he would prevent their thinking it odd the former did not visit him; but it was a terrible risk, for he must have gone to the lawyers at least once in his own character."

"He is close shaven now, probably he disguised himself with false hair when he went to them as Claude Maitland—but is this girl his wife?"

"Yes, they were married at church as soon as she recovered sufficiently, then he brought her abroad at once. Whenever his schemes have forced him to leave her he has made the excuse of having to dance attendance upon a fabulously rich old uncle."

"But my Hildred—why did he not leave her in peace?"

"Remember he thought me dead; in which case all belonged to her. If she had married her husband might have inquired into matters too closely. I don't suppose Maitland ever intended her to be more than his wife in name; he would have settled her somewhere in England on a moderate income, while he and Nan, as Mr. and Mrs. Maitland, lived in clover on the rest of the spoils."

"A dangerous game."

"But, under the circumstances, safe. He could insist on his wife residing abroad, while there was little chance of Miss Elsnore leaving England; he could run over occasionally and see after the estates. Oh! it was a deep laid scheme."

"But the man must be mad to come here while you are in the place, and Mrs. Robson must have mentioned you."

"Ah! but only as Mr. Devenish! My own name has long had painful memories for me, and now I shall renounce it for ever. I shall make over Tempest Mere to your fiancée as soon as possible."

"Please don't," said Hugh, earnestly, "with Netherton we shall be only too rich already, and I should like to think of you as master in your lost love's home."

Jim Devenish smiled sadly.

"It will come to the same thing in the end, for I shall never marry."

"Don't look too far ahead," urged Captain Trefusis, "there is plenty of good work waiting for the squire of Tempest Mere, and I am sure you are the right man to do it. But though we know Hildred's quondam persecutor is an impostor, remember we have no proof he is Claude Maitland. Ought we not to set that doubt at rest before we take any further steps? My name would alarm him at once, but yours will rouse no suspicions. Can't you go and call at the Maisonnette?"

"I have as good as promised Mrs. Robson to do so, but I hate the task."

Anthony, the Earl's faithful servant, assured Mr. Devenish Mrs. Robson had been down once or twice, she particularly wanted to see Mr. Devenish before he left St. Madeleine.

"And her son-in-law is still here?"

"Yes, sir, but the good lady herself is going to England early next week."

The friends exchanged glances.

"You see," said Jim, when the man had left the room, "he is free now to say with his wife; does not that prove my theory?"

"You must go to the Maisonnette the very first thing to-morrow."

Devenish agreed, and about ten o'clock he started on his dreaded task.

Hugh Trefusis strolled down to the sands. It was a lovely day, and, though January, in this favoured Southern spot the sun shone brightly.

Suddenly there came towards him two figures, a girl in all the bloom of youth and happiness, leaning on her husband's arm. That was what strangers would have said, but to Captain Trefusis, who remembered the man's cruel deception, and the suffering it had caused Hildred, the picture was maddening.

Here was a man who, having robbed his friend and deserted his betrothed before he came, and, under false excuses, married her; and then, keeping her hidden in a remote French village, proposed himself as the husband of an innocent girl!

"This villain could actually laugh and smile a few days after he had driven—as he believed—Hildred to a suicide's grave."

"This is an unexpected pleasure, Mr. Bertram."

The scoundrel's face blanched, his young wife looked bewildered. In a moment he had recovered his aplomb, and tried to brazen the matter out.

"You are mistaken, sir; my name is Maitland."

"I am not mistaken, you are the man who lied to Lady Tempest's solicitors by representing yourself as her heir, Guy Bertram; you are the villain who was to have married Hildred Elsinore on Christmas Eve, only Heaven saved her."

Nan turned to her husband appealingly.

"Claude, is he mad?"

"Mad, indeed, my darling," was the reply.

"You will find the English law calls your conduct by an ugly name," went on Trefusis, bitterly; "forgery, obtaining money under false pretences, and fraud make a pretty list of your crimes, even if the real Guy Bertram does not prosecute you for your robbery in Australia long ago."

The wretched man betrayed himself then, and forgot his role.

"Guy Bertram is dead!"

"On the contrary, he is now at the Maisonette enlightening Mrs. Robson as to your antecedents."

"Claude," cried Nan, piteously, "don't let him say such things, send him away."

The husband turned threateningly to Hugh;

"Will you go, sir?"

"No, I won't!" returned Trefusis, bravely; "I am a soldier, and I don't fear a cowardly villain like you. I don't lose sight of you until I meet the true Guy Bertram, and he has identified you as the wretch who robbed him when he was dying."

"He must be mad," whispered Nan to her husband. "Claude, do take me home."

With Hugh following them they climbed the hill to the Maisonette; the gate stood open, and Trefusis entered and reached the door before they noticed his intention; the French servant who answered his knock had no thought of denying Mrs. Robson, and Hugh soon found himself in the little salon.

"He will terribly mother," said Nan, "let us go and reassure her."

But Maitland pointed to the stairs.

"Go and lie down, my darling," he said, fondly; "I will deal with this maniac."

After she had obeyed him, he went into the little front garden and pressed his face against the drawing-room window to see if he could catch a glimpse of his mother-in-law's companion. Yes! there was no doubt; here was the man he had left dying in the Australian bush; here was the friend, whose inheritance he had stolen. Claude Maitland was quick enough to see the game was up. He took his hat, and went quietly out at the little gate, walked hurriedly to the station, and, by a stroke of luck, caught the morning train for Paris and the North.

Mrs. Robson listened like one in a dream while Jim Devenish told his story; and when Hugh arrived to endorse it the poor woman was almost crushed.

"My poor child," she cried, brokenly, "it will be her death-blow. I always doubted him, I couldn't make it out that any old gentleman should be so changeable as he made about his uncle was; and it seemed so odd, after telling me he should take Nan to Hastings, she should bring her to this lonely, wretched place."

"I would spare him for her sake," said the real Guy Bertram, "only he has wronged others besides me."

Mrs. Robson looked at them entreatingly. "Nan's my only child, gentlemen; I've worked for her, and slaved for her since she was a baby—Oh! don't tell me she must be a convict's wife."

"Not if I can help it," said Jim Devenish, gravely; "I am the person against whom he has sinned most, I am willing to pardon him on a full confession of his fraud. I don't not Captain Trefusis will do the same, when he remembers the stigma prosecution would cast on his young wife."

But Hugh hesitated.

"I can't forget the misery he caused my Hildred."

"Just because she is 'your' Hildred, because he has done her no lasting wrong, I think you will forgive him," urged Jim.

"And now," said Mrs. Robson, sadly, "what am I to do? Sir, don't think I want to screen the guilty, but can't I let Nan go on believing in him?"

"I am leaving with Captain Trefusis by the evening train," said Jim, kindly; "you know where to find me still then. If the confession reaches me before I start for England, I promise to abstain from all proceedings against your son-in-law."

Alas! the confession did not reach them; but a frantic message from Mrs. Robson, begging them to come to her at once, arrived two hours after they had left her. Claude Maitland, with the selfishness which had marked his whole career, had written from the station to his wife, and sent the note by a gambler waiting for such odd jobs about the streets, secure that, being in English, the boy could not read it, if he had the curiosity to try.

"Dear Nan,—I've no use trying to keep up the game now; it's all true, and I must fly to Spain, or they'll have me in prison, and it would be penal servitude. I have plenty of money with me for present necessities; and your mother must look after you. If ever I get on my legs again I'll send for you, but it'll be far better for you to forget me."

The note was taken to Nan in her own room; when her mother went up to her a few minutes later, she found her dead, with the cruel letter clasped in her hand. It had been as Doctor Friar said, she was not strong enough to stand trouble, and the sudden blow had killed her.

The two men who had been ready to spare Claude Maitland for his wife's sake were furious at his brutal thoughtlessness. Captain Trefusis started for London that very night, with his friend's authority to tell everything to Messrs. Williams and West, and urge them to prosecute the scoundrel with the utmost rigour of the law. Jim Devenish—he said he could not bear the sound of Bertram—stayed at St. Madeleine, resolved not to leave poor Mrs. Robson until Nan was in her last resting-place, and her mother free to return to England.

CHAPTER XXV.

The news broke like a bombshell on Little Netherton Rectory. Guy Bertram was an impostor and had never had a right to one penny of the Tempest property; the true heir was on his way to England, and the pretender had fled the country.

The Elsinores, not being extravagant enough to take in a newspaper, might not have heard this for some time, only Ada Smith, perhaps of malice preposse, herself despatched the "Copsleigh Times," which contained a full account of the disclosures, to Mrs. Elsinore.

In the end Claude Maitland escaped punishment; he probably followed the plan he announced to his wife, and went to Spain, for he was never heard of in England again. A search among his papers produced overwhelming proofs of his guilt, and by the end of January Tempest Mere was at the disposal of its lawful master, who, however, lingered in London a few days longer, because he had promised to be present at the wedding of Captain Trefusis Netherton and Hildred Elsinore.

Mr. and Mrs. Warrington, overjoyed at what seemed to them their niece's restoration from the grave, were delighted at her prospects. Old Mr. Trefusis, moved thereto, perhaps, by

Jim Devenish's express statement that she would be his heiress, received Hildred most kindly as his son's future wife, and the only problem in everyone's mind was how the news should be made known at Little Netherton.

Hugh had received several letters from or about that much troubled parish; the Bishop consulted him, as patron of the living, on the distressing relations which existed between the Rectory and the parishioners; the churchwardens begged the new lord of Netherton Castle to insist on Mr. Elsinore's resignation; and Mrs. Elsinore, her husband refused to do so himself, wrote a piteous inquiry as to whether he wished to take the bread out of her children's mouths.

Events at St. Madeleine had prevented Hugh from going to Netherton Castle as early as he had hoped; then sending in his papers and other things made him unusually busy, and when it wanted only a week to his wedding he awoke to the fact that something must be done. He carried his troubles to James Devenish, and found him able to suggest a remedy. The Rev. George Smith had recently received a valuable appointment near London, the living of Copsleigh Chase was vacant, and, being in his gift as master of Tempest Mere, he was willing to offer it to Mr. Elsinore.

"Depend upon it, Trefusis, neither you nor your wife will be the happier for the near neighbourhood of her step-mother. I believe Mr. Elsinore is a good man and a devoted clergyman, and, as I shall be resident in the parish, I can keep an eye on his wife, and not let her ride roughshod over people's prejudices."

"It's awfully good of you."

"I don't see it. Tell Mr. Elsinore I will make the value of the living up to four hundred a year, and provide a curate. Do you mean to let them know the truth about Hildred?"

"That depends."

He had written to Mrs. Hill to ensure being met at the station, but he was hardly prepared for what awaited him. Three sets of people were waiting at the Castle for an interview—Mr. Gibson, the Churchwardens, and Mrs. Elsinore. All these had been, prudently bestowed by Mrs. Hill in three separate rooms. Hugh, who had heard from Hildred of the Gibsons' kindness to her, gave the farmer the first innings.

He had come in the cause of peace. The breach—he told Mr. Netherton, Hugh was not quite used to his new name—was too wide to be healed. There was something to be said on both sides, but nothing could be so bad for the parish as the present state of things.

"I quite agree with you," replied Hugh, "and I think I can effect a remedy. I am desired by the patron of a living in the south to offer that appointment to Mr. Elsinore. It is worth about four hundred a year, and I sincerely hope he will accept it."

"She'll make him," said the farmer, grimly; "and, sir, if a man that's old enough to be your father may presume to speak, don't give us another person that's ought to depend on but the salary, unless so be he's only himself to think of. It stands to reason, a man can't think about other people's souls when he's so much to do to feed his own family."

"I rather think a cousin of my own will come here," said Hugh, frankly; "he's pretty well off, and his wife was an heiress, so I don't think you need fear any more poverty at the Rectory."

"Well, I'm glad to hear it, sir; I hated to think of Mr. Elsinore being forced to resign, and going away to starve, but the way you've worked it'll please us all; and now I won't take up your time further."



"YOU ARE THE VILLAIN THAT WAS TO HAVE MARRIED HILDRED ELSINORE ON CHRISTMAS EVE!" SAID TREFUSIS.

"But I've something to say to you. Do you ever go to London, Mr. Gibson."

"Not often, sir."

"Then, I suppose it's no use to ask you to my wedding. I'm going to be married next Tuesday, in London, and my bride is an old friend of yours."

"You must be joking, sir."

"No. She knew I was coming here to-day, and she asked me to thank you for all your kindness."

"But —"

"I am going to marry Hildred Elsinore. She was in dire straits, poor child, and the only way to escape from a marriage she hated was to let people think her dead."

"Well," exclaimed Farmer Gibson, when things had been made clear to him, "this beats all. My! but the bells shall ring a peal, sir, when you bring her home to the Castle."

Even the escape from the scene of her humiliation, even a better income, and a fresh start in life, could not quite atone to Mrs. Elsinore for the news of Hildred's good fortune. That the girl she had snubbed and ill-treated, should be a great lady was gall to her.

Hildred stayed at Kingsleigh till her wedding day. She was married at Beckenham Church, and she and Hugh spent their honeymoon at Bournemouth. It was rather a prolonged one, for the Castle had to be prepared for its new lady, and Hugh did not care to take his bride there until the Elsinores had left the Rectory.

Mr. and Mrs. Netherton spent a week in London, shopping, for the bride's trousseau had been prepared very hurriedly, and needed great additions. One of the first visits they paid together was to Daffodil-road.

How little Hildred had thought when she

left the pretty little house, her name would be changed before she returned to it!

Mr. Devenish met them in London, one day, and told Hildred her family were delighted with Copsleigh, and he liked Mrs. Elsinore very much. He, himself, was settling down as a country gentleman. One hobby he had was the building and endowing of a home or orphanage for twenty children. Mrs. Robson was to be the first matron, and already she had given up her house in Delaport-road, and moved to a pretty cottage near Tempest Mere, where she took almost as much interest in the building operations as Jim Devenish himself. She would never forget her lost child, but it was easier to think of Nan as safe in Paradise, than as a despairing, sorrow-stricken woman tied to a scoundrel like Claude Maitland.

Farmer Gibson fulfilled his promise, the bells rang a joyous peal; the cheers were loud and hearty as Mr. and Mrs. Netherton drove up the avenue to the Castle. The general feeling in the parish was that with their advent began a good time for the place.

And it did. When the Rectory—repaired and handsomely furnished—received the cheerful, kindly couple who had come to make their home there, it seemed as if a new impetus was given to everything; with the Castle and the Rectory both inhabited by wealthy, generous families, the poor of Netherton were well cared for. For the sick, a cottage hospital was built and endowed, and the place grew so thriving and prosperous that Farmer Gibson declared it did his heart good to see it.

David brought home an Australian wife, who loves him devotedly, and has never suspected he once hoped to win the lady of the Castle.

Mrs. Elsinore and her daughters have

never set foot in Netherton since they left it, but Hildred has often welcomed her father as her guest. Not till she had been married two years did she see her step-mother; then, when she was at the Mere staying with James Devenish, Mr. and Mrs. Elsinore were invited to dinner. The lady behaved with stilted politeness, as to a stranger, and Hildred found all her efforts at cordiality thrown away.

"It's no use," said Martha, who at nineteen retained her blunt speech; "mother can't forget that you are ten times richer than she is, and she'll never forgive you for it."

Hildred sighed.

"Do you like Copsleigh, Martha?"

"Very much; we've plenty to make both ends meet, and no one looks down on us. Only, Hildred, don't you go and worry over mother's temper; it's just her way, and she can't help it."

So between the Nethertons and the Elsinores no real intimacy existed, but as the years rolled on, many a kindly gift found its way from the Castle to Copsleigh Vicarage, and as Martha married young (the curate), and already has quite a numerous family, perhaps under the influence of baby voices Mrs. Elsinore may develop into quite an amiable old lady.

James Devenish was Hildred's staunch friend always. He would gladly have given up the Mere to her, but neither she nor Hugh would hear of such a thing; and so the lonely man uses his great wealth for the good of his fellow creatures. Far and wide his name is blessed and revered by those whose lot he had cheered and brightened with a little of the money which came to him so strangely by Lady Tempest's will.

THE END.



SIR CHARLES MAXWELL LEANED AGAINST THE DOORWAY—LOOKING DANGEROUSLY HANDSOME AND ATTRACTIVE!

TWO WOMEN.

CHAPTER XVII.

Hester found a great void in her life after Leonore went; it was almost strange how close and strong had grown the tie between the two girls in so short a time; Leonore's shortcomings and helplessness had applied directly to the warmth—the maternity, as it were—in the other girl's heart. Hester felt bereft of some clinging thing—something which depended upon her, and needed her care and protection when they were parted.

Leonore's wedding day was a sad one to Hester, she was very quiet and grave all the time, but a mist of tears came over her eyes at the very last, shutting out all sight of the incongruous looking bride and bridegroom as they drove rapidly away.

Mr. Chetwynde, too, was depressed and rather irritable. He had no occasion to love his ward, and indeed Leonore Leighton had been a cause of much worry and thought to him for a long while past, so that in all ordinary calculation he should have rejoiced at having fulfilled an onerous and difficult guardianship so well. But Hester's presentiment of evil was perhaps infectious; in any case, Mr. Chetwynde felt an uneasy sense of discomfort as he stood, too, and watched Lady Maxwell drive away.

"I hope it will go well. I hope so! I hope so!" he said, earnestly, half aloud, and half to himself.

Hester answered him, sorrowfully:

"How can it go well?" she said; and she turned indoors hurriedly, and shut herself in her room for a time.

Mr. Chetwynde returned to London by an early train. He had intended paying a visit to Mrs. Campbell, it would have eased his mind to have spoken a few plain truths to

her on the subject of Hester, but Mrs. Campbell had vanished from Sedgebrooke, and no one seemed to have any knowledge of her exact whereabouts at the moment, so that the lawyer had to work out his irritation as best he could by himself.

The day after the Maxwell marriage Violet drove over to Holmetstone, radiant, and full of spirits.

"I want to take you back with me for a week," she cried, as she greeted Hester. She wisely took up the thread of circumstances just as though they had never been in the least otherwise to what they now were, and as if her coming were quite a matter of course.

Hester was her usual self with Violet, quiet, grave, decided.

"I will spend an afternoon at Sedgebrooke, if you like, not a week. I cannot leave Miss Graham; she is, I am sorry to say, very far from well. She tired herself with the journey to London, and all the excitement of the wedding."

"Weddings are tiresome things," cried Lady Thurso, as she flitted in and about the school drawing-room. Pretty, delicate, dainty, as she was, she was yet an inharmonious note in the old-fashioned setting. She looked too bright, too new, too modern. Here all was faded and toned by years; Violet, with her smiles, her gleaming eyes, her warm-tinted hair, had nothing in common with the surroundings; she required a more gorgeous setting.

"So like you, dear Hester, to stay and nurse a sick old woman," she added, "only won't it be very dull?"

"No," Hester answered, coldly.

Violet found a certain satisfaction in looking at her step-sister to-day. Hester was not nearly so strikingly beautiful, Lady Thurso decided. Why, she had quite a worn, tired look, and her face was like it used to be in former days, thin and sallow, with two big

eyes "staring at one just like an owl would," Violet said to herself.

Hester did not vouchsafe the cause of her tired looks, which came from a night of nursing, and a night of deep thought. Miss Graham had, in fact, collapsed utterly after the wedding, and had seemed so ill and feverish that Hester had been too anxious to leave her, and seek her own rest. To some eyes, her face, with its shadowing of sorrow and fatigue, would have had but an added beauty, a weakness and a tenderness that were sometimes over-powered by her proud, cold bearing in strong moments; but Violet had no such subtle distinctions in her mind. She was essentially not either an artist or a poet, and she only saw Hester in what she considered a tired and unbecoming mood, deriving a distinct sense of pleasure in so doing.

"Well, if you won't come and stay, you must dine. We have some people coming who will interest you, and Thur can drive you home afterwards, you will enjoy that, then you two can get better acquainted. Thur is disposed to like you so much!"

Hester coloured faintly.

"Please do not think me rude, Violet," she said, gently, though hurriedly; "I would prefer not to dine, but I will come over for an hour this afternoon, if you wish it."

"Of course I wish it!" Violet laughed, but her lips did not smile easily. She read Hester absolutely, she understood the hesitation, the shrinking from her that almost amounted to repugnance. She knew, without words, what an effort it was to Hester to meet her, even in this restrained fashion. She had a furious longing upon her to seize this quiet, stately girl and shake her violently, venting some of her rage and impatience upon her. It was a poor triumph to feel that she was circumventing Hester against her will—a triumph that was robbed of the little value it possessed when she recalled that,

had not that link from the dead man been forged between Hester and Alice Carne, and in a slighter degree between Hester and Thurso, she might have put out all her arts in vain to work her step-sister into her plans. The old unburied sense of wrath and vexatious vanity, that Hester's coldness and habit of holding herself aloof had always provoked in Violet's mind, came up now to swell and strengthen all the rest of the causes she had raised up in Hester's person, to stand before her like an enemy in her path. Besides, this sort of chilly acquaintance was by no means what she had worked to obtain. Hester certainly gave no signs of being malleable and useful as she sat there receiving her step-sister courteously, but coldly.

"I suppose we shall have to take whatever we can get, since you are so hard-hearted," she answered Hester, half poutingly. "I think you are hard to have given so much time and trouble to Lady Maxwell, and never care to please poor little me!" Then Violet lost her babyishness hurriedly. She was accustomed to use it to most people so successfully, but a glance at Hester's face showed her it was not well-judged to use it here. She substituted a more mature manner instantly.

"Thurso will be delighted to see you. I hope you will come early, and I hope it won't rain; it looked very gloomy in the distance as I drove here. I must be trotting off again, or you will think me a nuisance, and say I take up all your time. I hope Miss Graham will soon be better."

Violet's face had little of childishness in it as she drove homeward leaning on the cushions of her luxurious Victoria. There were ponies for Lady Thurso's use had she been so minded, but Violet detested doing anything for herself; she was not an Amazon or a good whip, and she was too vain of her small, white hands to let them be devoted to any masculine form of employment. She chose to be conveyed about in her elegant bouchée or Victoria, except when she sat beside Thurso's well-built form, and sped rapidly behind his splendid pair of bays. The novelty of her position as mistress of all these possessions had held a great charm for Violet. At first, she had delighted in realising, then for the sake of enjoying her grandeur, and had been content to enjoy them alone without a crowd to admire and envy, but it was a charm that soon went.

Already Lady Thurso was aching for a new phase of life, for down, with all its fashionable throng, all its gaieties and social triumphs; she fretted at having to wait for this. She wanted it at once; she was tired of Sedgewooke, even though it was a very different life now to what it had been before. She was also growing tired of Thurso's perpetual companionship; he never really interested her except when he was admiring her, and letting her understand she was the most beautiful of all living creatures in his eyes.

Hester's attitude produced this frown on Violet's face now. "She was vexed and disappointed. True, she had the satisfaction of feeling she was bending Hester's will to hers, but she wanted something more than this; she wanted above all else to have an intimate, or pretended intimate, friendship with her sister, not this cold, formal acquaintanceship. What help would this be to bringing her in close contact with Charles Maxwell? None whatever. Hester, as she had been in this short interview, was neither satisfactory nor pleasant.

"But for him I would drop her altogether; I would let her go out of my life, out of my thoughts. I would do without the joy of giving her some sort of punishment," Violet said to herself. "She is a nasty, stuck-up prig, and I hate her worse and

worse each time I see her; yet I can't do without her, if I want to get at him and —." And Violet owed to herself that there was nothing, even at this sunlit period of her life, that she desired more earnestly than to bring herself closely and persistently in Sir Charles Maxwell's life and doings.

She had worked herself into a bad temper by the time she got back to Sedgewooke, but, fortunately for himself, Thurso was absent on some business about the estate. Violet never troubled herself to inquire much about her husband's business, and he on his part determined his little love should be spared as long as possible all knowledge of worry or thought in life.

For himself, Thurso had much to occupy his mind; not only did the remembrance of his mother's anger give him constant pain, but the more mundane part of things gave him much food for thought. The fact was that he was by no means a naturally idle man, and though he was as light-hearted and full of fun as any creature needed to be, there was also in Thurso another side of his character which made him eager and anxious to bring some honourable task into his life, and not to go down to his old age having achieved nothing except spend money and enjoy himself. For this reason he had determined to adopt some sort of career. He inclined to a Parliamentary one, and he would go into it with every zest and earnestness to do good in the cause to which he should belong. All this, however, so far, he kept to himself. He had a pretty good idea that Violet would neither understand nor sympathise with him in his intentions, and until they were more closely formed he determined to say nothing to his wife or to any one.

There was also forming, half vaguely in his mind, a desire to turn to his pen as a means to help him onwards on a path a little higher and better than that which he was at present leading, but here also Thurso paused; he would have liked to have poured out his hopes and ambitions into his wife's willing and sympathetic ear, but it was almost incongruous to associate his lovely, delicate, butterfly-like little love with the subject of study and mental advancement.

The days passed; it was now some weeks since Thurst's first visit to Sedgewooke after Leonore's marriage.

The pupils had reassembled at Helmetstone School, and Hester had elected to remain on with Miss Graham. She was not a regular student, but she still joined in some of the classes, and had, Mr. Chetwynde's consent to do just what she pleased in this matter.

"I should have thought you knew enough already, in that clever brain of yours," he said to her when she saw him and told him she had determined to remain with Miss Graham for some time longer, "but I suppose you are not satisfied?"

"Can one learn too much?" Hester asked, with a laugh. "She was growing very happy and peaceful in this old school-house, and she took up her studies, not only for the pleasure of increasing her knowledge, but also as a sort of barrier to ward off too many attacks from Violet."

She went to Sedgewooke as rarely as she possibly could, but she found herself compelled to accept some of the many invitations showered upon her by Lady Thurso. She had also elected to stay on with Miss Graham from feelings of mingled affection and pity. After many years of incessant labour in her school the old governess fell into failing health. She was endeared to Hester by her hundred good qualities, and

from the remembrance of her ready sympathy and belief in the girl from the very first, although Hester had come to her laden with such a bad character.

Violet was irritated intensely by the poor progress she made in her proposed friendship with Hester, and said so many times to her husband, who could not always agree with her, especially when she said some harsh things of Miss Graham, and accused her of being interested in keeping Hester so closely allied to her.

Thurso had been deeply touched at once by the girl's great kindness to the sick woman. He saw in an instant that her care of his uncle, and all that she had done for him, had not been in the least exaggerated. He defended both Miss Graham and Hester against Violet's irritation, and he could not hide from himself, as he became better acquainted with his wife's step-sister, that there was thus in Hester Trevelyan a noble nature which must always make close contact between herself and Violet an impossibility; not that he had yet found Violet any different than she had always been in his mind, but that he stood in something like silent reverence before the pure, high mind, the lofty soul of this other girl.

"So silly of Hester," Violet cried. "What chance will she ever get, shut up in a poky school-house like that? If she would only be a little more sensible and sociable she would get on. Don't you remember, Thurso, how much Mr. Saville admired her that day he met her here? I do believe he would have asked her to marry him, and think how rich he is!"

"Now, I warn you, my darling, if you are going to turn match-maker, you will lay up for yourself no end of trouble and disappointment," Thurso answered, with a laugh.

Violet shrugged her shoulders.

"Of course I don't expect you to be exactly sympathetic about Hester and her future, but I am naturally much interested in her," she said, a little tartly, "and I shouldn't be in the least surprised to hear any day that Hester will elect to live with Miss Graham all her life, and then it will be hopeless."

"If she be happy in that arrangement, darling, is there any reason why she should not?"

Violet answered her husband, sharply:

"Plenty of reasons!" she cried, and she could have supplied him two or three. "The more Hester drew back from her, and her plans the more eagerly Violet pursued her. The Maxwells were back from their trip, they were in London. Odds and ends of people gave Violet information about them, always with a note of exclamation over Lady Maxwell's regrettable appearance and dull personality, and twice she knew for a certainty the newly-married pair had been down to Helmetstone and paid a visit to Leonore's old home."

It maddened Violet to think that Charles Maxwell ignored her so entirely; days and weeks had gone by, and he had never vouchsafed the very faintest knowledge of her presence, or interest in it. She could not hear enough news of him, or get it quickly enough, yet she could not but feel that he on his side managed to live his life absolutely forgetting her, and not giving her the slightest straw with which to build up any structure of satisfied hope or vanity. She began to urge Thurso to go up to town, but, beyond a short visit of a few days, in which, though she tried ever so hard, she never came across the Maxwells; Thurso would not agree.

"We will just stay down here quietly through the winter till after Christmas is well over, then, if my little love likes, she shall have a flying visit to the Riviera to set her up for the rigours of her first sea-

son," he answered her, tenderly, yet firmly. He did not explain that money was not found in the inexhaustible way Violet seemed to imagine, and to prepare for all the expenses that lay before them in the spring he must husband his forces, so that life would be enjoyable without any great material anxiety. He had a little pained feeling that Violet should have wanted so soon in their married life to plunge into the waters of the world and all its dissipations, but love always had an excuse ready for her; she was so young, she had seen so little of life, she was so full of spirit and excitement and enjoyment; after all, he told himself, it was only natural.

He invited several people down to stay in the house, and Violet seemed to enjoy this new element very much. She tried to induce Hester to come over often to Sedgemoor, but she was rarely successful. Then, finding she did not progress as she wanted, Violet cast about in her mind for some other bait with which to win Hester into her hands, and, through Hester, that other one.

"If Alice Carne were only here!" she said to herself once, and after that she was not happy till she had worked the thought into action. It was she who suggested Thurso writing and inviting his sister on a visit; and when the telegram came back saying plainly how much Lady Alice would love to accept the invitation, but how powerless she was to do so unless her brother made personal intercession on her behalf, Violet at once urged her husband to go up to Scotland, as his sister desired.

"You will want to see your mother some day, and you must go to her, since she will not come to you," she said, with a well-put touch of wistfulness in her voice, which she knew would go straight to Thurso's heart. She never by any chance spoke unkindly of his mother, or of the slight old Lady Thurso put upon her, and Thurso was deeply touched by her supposed thought in this speech. He kissed her tenderly, and he went to Scotland with a prayer in his heart that he might find his mother more gentle, more tender, and less difficult to manage.

"If she would only be kind to my darling I should want for nothing—nothing!" he said to himself; and if he knew, in his inmost heart that there were many little things in his new life which he not only needed, but should have liked to change, Thurso was too loyal to his love to let that knowledge become a conviction or a confession.

CHAPTER XVIII.

It was while her husband was away up in Scotland that Violet tasted the first joy of satisfaction; and what she called success. She drove over to Helmetstone to tell Hester of Lady Alice Carne's expected arrival, and as her carriage drew up at the door she had a thrill at her heart, for her blue eyes caught sight of a man's form she knew so well, standing just within the entrance. She had arrived just in time, it seemed. Sir Charles and Lady Maxwell had paid their visit, and were evidently about to take their departure to the station in the village fly.

"Quelle chance!" Violet cried, as she sprang from her carriage and held out her tiny hand to Leonore, who looked more clumsy and ungainly than before, decked out in Parisian finery; "for I suppose you were not even thinking of being so charming. Lady Maxwell, as to come and pay me a visit."

Leonore said "No" to this, bluntly, without any graceful addition.

"Good Heavens! What a hideous monster!" Violet said to herself, with almost a perceptible shiver. Charles Maxwell, reading

her like a book, smiled for an instant beneath his dark moustache.

"I am afraid we had almost forgotten you graced this part of the world with your charming presence, Lady Thurso," he said, subtly.

Violet looked at him out of her blue eyes reproachfully, but he only smiled at her again.

Leonore had nothing to say to Lady Thurso. There were red marks about her eyes, she had been evidently crying.

"You are very loyal to your old home and old friends, Lady Maxwell," Violet said, setting her teeth fixedly, and saying to herself that, having found him by chance, she would not let the chance go by without adding to it.

"Miss Graham is very ill," Leonore said, awkwardly, and tears came into her eyes again, and her lips trembled; "very ill. She is going blind."

Violet did not in the least care whether Miss Graham lost her sight entirely; but she of course expressed some pretty commiseration. Lady Maxwell left her in the middle of the speech. Hester's voice was sounding from the stairs, and Leonore hurried back to answer her friend's summons. Violet was left alone with her old lover. She had never looked fairer, never been more beautiful, than at this minute, but Charles Maxwell's eyes dwelt coldly upon her. He saw no beauty, only her false, cold, mean nature; and, moreover, he had the vision of another face before him, too strong, too fascinating, to let any other image live.

"You are very kind, are you not?" Lady Thurso said, speaking hurriedly. "It is not every man who would come down into the country for the purpose of visiting a sick old woman, Sir Charles," she paused a very little. "I—I don't think this is what you would have done once."

He laughed a little.

"Possibly not, but then I am a changed man to the one you knew, Lady Thurso."

Violet grew pale beneath his look and at his words. Anger made her spiteful.

"I hope you are very happy," she murmured, and he understood her sneer perfectly.

"Thanks," he answered; "we are as happy as two ordinary people can hope to be, I think."

He leaned against the doorway, looking dangerously handsome and attractive to the woman before him.

"You are easily content," she said, in a stifled sort of way, the colour mounting hotly into her cheeks.

"I have everything I want; why should I not be contented, Lady Thurso?" was the reply given to her very coldly, yet lightly.

Violet's heart beat wildly. His manner infuriated her, his indifference was too easy to be assumed, hurtful as it was. She could not fail to see that he did not care a toss of a button whether he would ever set eyes on her again or not. She lost her discretion.

"You would not have said that two years ago," she said, in a low trembling voice.

Sir Charles laughed.

"Two years ago," he said, stooping to put Jane, the terrier, who came snuffling towards them; "is it possible you can remember all the trivialities and follies of two years ago? Quant à moi, j'en ai oublié tous. That is the best of a convenient memory—one is troubled with so little."

He was enjoying himself amazingly. Every variation of colour, every expression that passed over Violet's face, revealed his power more fully, and gave him intense satisfaction. There was no chance of saying more now, for at this moment Leonore came back in her heavy way.

"Well, have you made every sort of ar-

rangement at last?" her husband asked her, calmly; he was always perfectly calm with her. He regarded her in the light of an absolute monstrosity, just as Violet did, but he did not allow that fact to distress him very much. He was with her so little; just as little as he possibly could be. He would not have been with her now but that Hester Trefusis was in Helmetstone, and Hester was a magnet that would have drawn Charles Maxwell much farther than that.

"I have been telling Lady Thurso all that is going to happen, my dear," he went on; "how you are going to give Miss Graham every sort of assistance, and how the school is broken up, and you are going to stay down here for a while until the oculist has operated on the eyes. My wife, as you say, Lady Thurso, is absolutely loyal to her friends, you see!"

Violet did not find it easy to recover her composure in his presence. She was almost frightened at the hot rush of longing that came over her to be more often in that presence. It was not anger; it was not vanity; it was a different feeling to either of these. Something Violet had never experienced in her life before, except that once when she had met him again after so long an absence, and she had found him a creature full of strange charm to her, even though he annoyed and hurt her. She felt weak—unlike herself, when she looked at his dark, handsome face; his dark eyes that could burn with such fire, such passion, but which were so cold to her, and looked on her beauty so indifferently.

"I shall hope to see something of you, Lady Maxwell, since you are coming so close to us. You must really promise to pay us a visit."

Sir Charles replied gracefully for his wife.

"You may be very sure, Lady Thurso," he said, with more warmth than he had yet used to her, "you may be quite sure that if my wife should be prevented from accepting your kind invitation, I shall avail myself of it most gladly."

He almost laughed as he saw the colour and the delight leap into Violet's face.

"She is going to be amusing," he said to himself, as he handed Leonore into the fly and got in after himself, "and what is life without amusement? Tiens! If I had desired to find a hard punishment for that little falsehood, I could not have been more successful; but she is far less clever than she shaped to be. A little tighter squeeze of my hand and I can mould her which way I like. The prospect has certain charms, and, as I said, it will be amusing. Besides, it may be useful!" And there was an enigmatical look in the man's dark eyes as he glanced back at the old school-house.

Violet was radiant after that last speech of his. She was blinded by it. She took it to mean far more than it did. Her vanity expanded and exulted. Life had another and a brighter aspect.

"He is pretending, that is all," she said to herself; "he is pretending, and he has not forgotten he wants to punish me, but he has not forgotten it would be impossible for him to forget after such a readiness."

Violet's thoughts were busy as she sought Hester. She was conscious of no other desire, be it said to her credit, at this moment than to feed her vanity by a return of her old power. The madness that afterwards filled her veins was only faintly shadowed forth in her present feelings. Had she been actuated by the smallest true or sincere sentiment towards the man she had married? Violet's thoughts must have been very different if she had been of an

other nature. Reared in a different school a dozen things would have arisen within her to check and destroy the foolish wrong thoughts that crowded within her. But being what she was Violet snapped her fingers at principle, was untroubled by conscience, and followed her own pathway of life, heedless and happy so long as she got all she desired.

When Thurso returned without his sister he might have spared himself all the tender little speeches he had prepared. Violet's sense of pride had vanished at this moment. At another time, before events had changed so swiftly, she would have been furious, and deeply mortified at the persistent way in which old Lady Thurso refused to stretch out even a finger to her. To Thurso's intense relief his wife made no comments—asked no questions—accepted his well-framed explanation and excuses quietly.

"She is an angel!" Thurso said to himself, warmly. He had been bitterly disappointed; he had gone to his mother with his heart in his hand, but after the first ten minutes he had seen his journey was useless, and all hope of gentle forgiveness from his mother was at an end for ever. He had been dreadfully grieved, too, at the sight of his sister.

"Oh! Dick, if I might only live with you. Oh! Dick, Dick! It is so lonely, so desolate up here; and now, you hear, we are to stay the whole winter, and I shan't see Hester or Violet after all."

Thurso comforted the disappointed girl as well as he could, but he felt too disheartened to find many words of real comfort, his own disappointment was so great.

"I am afraid there is no help for it, Allie, dear, we can do nothing."

Lady Alice cried freely.

"But I don't see why mother can't forgive you. Poor little Violet! what has she done? Oh! Dick, I am so sorry for her, and for you, too."

Thurso patted her shoulder gently.

"Can't you go and stay with Gertrude?" he said, casting about in his thoughts for some way of helping her. He spoke of another sister.

"I will write to her, but Gertrude is always taken up with her children. Gertrude's children are always ill," Lady Alice said, plaintively. "If it wasn't for Billy Crossley I don't know what I should do. But there, I will cry no more; all the tears in the world won't help me now; mother has made up her mind, and there her mind will stay. Tell me more about Hester. Is she as beautiful as her picture, Dick? I think I never saw anyone more lovely."

"She is even more beautiful," Thurso answered, thoughtfully, "and she is charming, not in the least like other girls."

"You must tell her how grieved I am not to meet her;" and then Lady Alice gave him a dozen messages to carry back with him to the girl whom, though she had never seen, she had learned to love, and she shed many more tears after that brief visit of Thurso's ended, and he was gone back to the south, and to his home.

He took an early opportunity of riding over to Helmetstone, and asked for Hester.

Miss Trefusis was in the garden, he was told, and there he found her, pacing to and fro under the leafless trees, with Dane beside her, and a hat with a touch of vivid scarlet in it, making the depth and changeable colour of her eyes seem more beautiful and mysterious. She was lost in thought, and gave a little cry of surprise, and it seemed to him, of pleasure, too, as he stood before her.

"You have come back?" she said, and then he saw she had read his failure and

disappointment in his face, "I am sorry—you have not brought her."

Thurso held her hand a moment.

"Poor little Allie! She cried her eyes out; she wants to see you so much, Hester. She wanted to come so badly, but it was not to be, just yet."

"I am sorry," Hester said, in her grave, gentle way.

Thurso gave an unconscious sigh of relief as he dropped into a walk beside her. He was always sensible, in an indefinite way, of being comforted and at peace in Hester's presence. They saw very little of one another, but already Thurso felt as though he had known her all his life.

"Alice is in love with your picture, Hester," he said, and then he laughed, half shyly, "she calls you very beautiful."

A hot wave of colour passed over her delicate face.

"What does she do with herself up there?" Tell me more about her," Hester said, hurriedly.

He obeyed her, but he found himself looking at her as he spoke. He seemed to find a new and infinite loveliness in her to-day.

Violet was right, he again told himself, Hester was being wasted, shut out of sight here; and yet, he had an odd sort of sensation that it gave him pleasure to come upon her in this desolate old garden, with no vulgar eyes to criticise, no vulgar tongues to make remark. She appealed to him a little in the same way that his sister's purity and delicate health appealed, and yet with this he had a different regard for Hester. She was no mere girl, awkward in her innocence; she was a woman, grown to womanhood like some rare stainless flower. Thurso seemed to feel that Hester was a flower born, not to bloom in the world, as his own most radiant Violet, but to live alone, apart, shut out from all those gaieties and joys which were so dear to Violet, but which would give no pleasure to this other.

They talked of Miss Graham's illness, and Thurso drew from Hester a tender description of Leonore's goodness to her old governess. Lady Maxwell had come forward as a daughter might have done, and took upon herself all the charge and care of the poor woman, finding everything that was necessary, heaping comfort and luxury about the sufferer.

"It was so sad—the day the girls all went away," Hester said, dreamily. "They none of them wanted to go, but we thought it best, because the anxiety would have been too much for her brain, and then she must have quiet."

"And it is quiet here," Thurso said, looking about him, "do you ever go out, Hester; can you ride? Why not come out with me now and then, Violet does not care for riding?"

"Later on, perhaps, not now," Hester said, with her faint smile that thanked him for his thought of her.

"So you have got Lady Maxwell back with you, and what does Sir Charles say?"

"He is here too!" Hester answered, and if Thurso had been looking at her he would have noticed that a sudden frown contracted her brows, and changed the expression of her face.

"Are they going to stay long?" Lord Thurso inquired, not that he was particularly interested in the Maxwell's, though he was touched by the record of Leonore's goodness.

"I am not sure," Hester said; then, with a touch as of ice in her voice, she added: "Here is Sir Charles."

Charles Maxwell greeted Lord Thurso warmly.

"Well met! you have saved me a journey, I wanted to see you. Pray don't go, Miss Trefusis, my business is not private."

Hester bowed her head, but walked slowly on, followed by the terrier.

Maxwell looked after her. How cold she was, how contemptuous! How she despised him. She never lost an opportunity of letting him see how she disliked and despised him. There was a suppressed excitement in his manner, and a flash in his eye as he watched her move away.

"I am afraid I disturbed you, but I learned that you had ridden over, and I wanted to see you, Lord Thurso, as I am anxious to know if we can come to terms about that little place of yours the other side of Sedgebrooke. You have very decent sport here, and, as my wife wants to remain in this neighbourhood, I thought I should like that small shooting if you are so disposed. I was speaking to Lady Thurso about it yesterday, and she said she thought there would be no difficulty."

Thurso looked, as he was intensely surprised that Violet should have known anything of his business arrangements; but he answered Sir Charles cordially and courteously, and they strolled up and down for a little, discussing the matter further, while in the distance Hester's tall, proud, figure moved to and fro, waking deeper and deeper admiration in Maxwell's breast. Her coldness to him was as distinctly disagreeable as his coldness had been to Violet. Hester had little notion of the fire that was kindled in this man's thoughts for her. She disliked him from instinct first, and then because of the unworthy part he was playing in Leonore's life. She dismissed as contemptuous, and she never regarded him as dangerous. Yet dangerous was what Maxwell was fast becoming as his passion for her increased, and he realized only more bitterly how despicable and poor a thing he was in her eyes.

The two men walked across the lawn, and joined Hester on the other side.

"The business is finished," Sir Charles said, with his enigmatical smile, which always produced a jarring sensation in the girl's breast, without her exactly understanding why.

When Thurso spoke it was as though some delicious fresh breeze had come towards her. She knew nothing of the world, yet she knew everything as far as the character of these two men was concerned. It hurt her somehow to see them together, though for that thought she had absolutely no good reason to assign.

"I must write a long, long, letter to Allie," she said to Thurso, as he prepared to go.

"Ah, do!" he answered, warmly, "She told me she lived for your letters."

"Poor little Allie!" Hester said, tenderly.

She stood looking across the gardens, smiling a little, not thinking of the two pair of eyes bent steadily upon her. Shyness was not a fault with Hester, and yet she was in all things pre-eminently modest. She shrank from Sir Charles' eyes because she disliked him, and there was something almost baleful in his glance, but at this moment she was not even conscious that he was looking at her.

He was doing more than looking, he was studying her, and the flush that came into her cheek as Thurso took her hand in farewell was at once a revelation and a furious pain to the other man.

"She is asleep yet, but she will wake soon, and wake for him!" he said to himself, and the mere thought made him tremble with the emotions it roused within him. For the first time in his life love—real, true, honest love—was coming into Charles Maxwell's thoughts, and as it came he recognised that, for the first time also, he would have suffering along with love. Even now this pale, proud, beautiful creature had had more power to hurt him than any other being before in all his life. And the pain and

bitterness that came as he looked on her face as she spoke with Thurso was something keener than he had thought it possible he could suffer.

He walked with Lord Thurso to where a man stood holding his horse, and as Violet's husband rode swiftly away, the other looked steadily after him.

"By God!" he said, between his teeth, "but she has power over me, power such as no other woman has had, and she is cold as ice to me, while to him—" His face was contracted for an instant, and then he smiled, though there was no mirth in his eyes. "Nous verrons," he said to himself, with a faint smile. "The future will reveal all. If it be for me, I am ready, and if it be not for me, I am not unprepared. Hester herself has supplied me with all I need."

With that he turned, and went back to the gardens to join her in her walk, but as he reached them he found them empty, and he knew, with hot bitterness, the girl had returned into the house so that she might escape further meeting with him for the moment.

(To be continued.)

A PLAYTHING OF FORTUNE.

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CHAPTER XLIV.

It seemed hours, instead of minutes, to both Brenda and Violet, that they stood there staring at each other in a deathly sort of silence that seemed to have paralysed them both.

"What does it mean?" was the question that kept repeating itself in Brenda's brain. "Why does she look at me like that? Can it be possible that she knows?"

Then at last, with a sort of shiver, she unfastened her eyes from Violet's, as a bird might in releasing itself from the inexplicable influence of the serpent, and as her gaze roved beyond Violet's head she caught sight of her own reflection in a mirror.

She started, and a low cry fell from her lips.

She saw that her cap had fallen back, and that her wig was awry, exposing the dark hair beneath.

Then she thought she understood.

Violet was angry because she was in her house under a disguise. She knew nothing of the real truth. Her own guilt had made her subject to this torture, that was all; and with these thoughts she tried to comfort herself.

Her lips drew into a sort of horribly strained smile.

"I—I have to—to apologise to you," she stammered, "for coming into your house in disguise. Doctor Hastings advised it, as he said I was so—so young to—nurse that no one would trust me. Indeed, madame, I—"

She broke down utterly. She did not even know how she had intended to complete her sentence, and with that steadfast glare fixed upon her, she could not think. In utter despair she stood there waiting helplessly for Violet to speak.

And Violet knew that this woman was the wife of the man whom she called her husband. What did it mean? Did Lionel Warrinder know that he had lied, and that this woman lived? She could find no answer to her mental question, and yet upon the answer so much depended. She saw clearly that she must have time to discover what the truth of the situation was, and that she must have time to think, before she took any action whatever.

"I am greatly surprised," she said, frigidly, "to find a young woman in my house in disguise. It never looks honest, however

innocent one may be in intention. But I never wish to be unjust to anyone, I shall ask you for no explanations, as you might be as fertile at invention as you are apt at disguise, but I shall speak to Doctor Hastings on the subject. If he tells me that you assumed it under his advice, I shall have nothing more to say, though I confess I don't like it. There is just one question that I should like to put to you: Does any member of this household know that you are not what you appear here?"

"Upon my honour, no."

"That will do. You may resume it and continue to occupy your position here as if nothing had happened, until I see the doctor."

She turned to go, but before she had reached the door, Brenda sprang forward and caught her by the folds of her gown.

"Madame," she cried, "I know that I have not the right to ask any favour of you, and yet there is one that I beseech you to grant. Keep my unfortunate secret. If you are not satisfied with what Doctor Hastings tells you, you can send me away; but as I have done nothing wrong in your household other than wearing a colour of hair that is not my own, I beg of you to tell no one of my disgrace in your eyes, until you find I have done something to merit exposure. Surely the favour is not so great that you must refuse, and it means so much to me—so much!"

Violet looked at her coldly. She had not the time even to analyse that speech there, and answered:

"I shall do nothing and promise nothing at present. I shall wait for Dr. Hastings."

She disengaged her gown and left the room slowly, walking with almost measured tread down the hall to her own room.

Once inside, she locked the door and stared about her. A pallor that was awful had settled over her features. It had dawned fully upon her what this situation meant to her.

"Alive!" she cried, in a hoarse whisper, crouching herself down in the depths of a great arm chair, as though she would hide from her very self. "Alive! It is she! There can be no mistake! There is no mistake! Alive! And Lionel said she was his wife! Does he know? Does he know that she is here beneath my very roof? No, I do not believe he does. That is what she meant when she begged me to tell no one of my discovery. She does not know that he has told me. But, good God! what does this make of me? Wedded, yet no wife! A thing for the scorn of my sex! A creature to be laughed at for my credulity and pitted for my misfortune! God of Heaven! I, Violet Clifton, wedded, yet neither wife nor widow! What shall I do? What shall I do? What shall I do?"

She arose and began walking up and down the floor, as a caged animal does, wild with the fear and wrath upon her. Her hands were clenched, and there was the expression of the wild beast in her eyes.

"I will not accept the position!" she cried, between her clenched teeth. "Why should I be made to suffer because of his sin? I have wealth, and the secret in my possession alone—the secret that she lives. I will find a way. I swear I will find a way! And if it costs every dollar of my fortune, and every drop of blood from my heart, I will put her out of my life and his! I can't bear it, and I won't! I won't! I won't!"

For half an hour she walked, and thought, and planned, then stopped suddenly before a mirror.

"I must see Lionel first, and find out how much of this he knows, how much he suspects. I must discover if he is playing me false, and then—"

A hard, cruel, cold smile crossed her face. She rearranged her hair in its most becoming

manner, changed her gown with her own hands to one of pure white, in which Lionel had once complimented her, then rang her bell violently.

"Is Mr. Warrinder in?" she asked of her maid.

"I don't know, madam."

"Then find out, and ask him to come to me if he is here."

She closed the door, and waited almost breathlessly until she heard her husband's step in the hall; then she opened the door for him, and closed it behind him.

She observed how harassed and worried he appeared; but that might be accounted for in a thousand ways. Her heart was beating almost to suffocation; but Violet was not a bad actress, and, with a singularly wistful expression of countenance, she went up to him and placed her hand upon his shoulder.

"Lionel," she said, tenderly, "I have sent for you to ask you to forgive me. Wait! Please don't interrupt me and make it easy for me, as I see your kind heart inclines you to do. I have been very wicked, very unforgiving; but it was love for you, dear, and jealousy that caused it. You don't know how I have suffered, and how I have prayed for your love. I have been hard and cold, but it was not from any want of love, and I see it all now. Will you forgive me?"

She had pushed him gently into a seat, and was kneeling beside him, her faced buried upon his knee. He lifted her very tenderly, until she was seated upon his knee, then drawing her head back to his shoulder, pushed her hair back from her brow and kissed her.

"So gladly, Violet!" he said, quietly. "I have done the wrong, not you, and the thought that you have not turned from me makes it seem that Heaven will one day forgive me."

"You are very good to me, Lionel."

"Not I, dear girl. It is you who are good to me. We will begin our married life anew. My wife shall be my wife in reality at last."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean in the sight of God, as well as of man. The past has been a horrible mistake, dear, but, thank Heaven! it is not too late."

She slipped her arm around his neck, so that her own face was hidden, while his was distinctly visible to her.

"No," she said, "it is not too late. But it has been very hard upon me, Lionel. I must tell you everything, now. I have loved you so dearly that your lack of love has almost killed me. I am a woman of terribly strong feelings, and the jealousy was an awful thing to overcome, when I knew that you had had another wife, whom you loved better than you ever loved me."

His face darkened painfully.

"Don't let us speak of that, dear heart. It is the one painful memory of my life. It ought to have died long ago. Let it be dead to both of us now."

"But is that possible, dear. Can we strangle memory?"

"No; but we can starve it by giving it nothing to feed upon. She is dead, poor girl! and I am sure that up there in heaven she does not wish me to remember when it brings but unhappiness."

"Will you let me see her picture just once more, Lionel? I shall never ask you again."

He opened the locket, and she took it in her hand.

There could be no mistake. The eyes and hair were the same; every line of the beautiful face was there. What did it mean?

"Were you present when she died?" she asked him, after a long pause.

"No."

"Then, are you sure—"

"I saw her dead," Violet; I buried her and stood by her coffin until the last."

She sighed and kissed him.

"Leave me for a little, dear," she said, tenderly. "It has been very painful. Come again in a few hours, and I promise you that memory of the past shall be buried in her grave."

And he went, but too glad to get away with the recollection of Brenda so much revived in his heart, for somehow it had been living with him through every hour of every day recently; and Violet, when alone, sprung up like a tigress again and began her hysterical walks.

"What can it mean?" she groaned. "He does not know; I am sure of it. I should believe myself mistaken, and that it was but the result of a striking resemblance, but for the disguise. Then, too, she entreated me to say nothing. What is to be done? I will not yield my place as Lionel Warrender's wife—not for ten thousand girls like this creature whom he has married! I will not—not if it requires murder for me to keep my place! But what is to be done? I must think fast and to the point. Oh, if I could but discover if it is true! I must! I must! But how?"

CHAPTER XLV.

"A gentleman to see you, madame."

A visiting-card was handed to Violet, and lifting it listlessly, she read:

"Mr. Harry Best."

She was about to send word by her servant that she was not at home, when some presentiment to which she yielded overcame her. She bowed her head.

"Say that I shall join him at once," she exclaimed.

She went to the mirror and examined herself reflectively; then, apparently satisfied with what she had seen, she turned away and left the room. Her face was pale almost to ghastliness; but all of Violet's cosmetics were of the simplest character, and she could not have helped that even had she tried. She rubbed her cheeks vigorously to put some colour into them, as she came near the drawing-room, but she was still strangely pale when she entered it.

Harry Best, always well got-up, arose and advanced, gently pressing the hand she offered.

"This is quite an unexpected pleasure!" exclaimed Violet. "When did you come to town?"

"Yesterday. I heard you were expecting to leave soon, and therefore did not wait for your reception-day."

"I'm glad you did not, though we do not leave as early as expected. My husband's little adopted son is very ill, and we are compelled to wait awhile on that account."

"I can't understand how you could ever have allowed him to do such a foolish thing as to adopt a son. One's own children are trouble enough; without the care of a stranger's child. Forgive me if I have taken a liberty in speaking so plainly."

"There is nothing to forgive. The desire was not mine; but I had no objections to offer when Lionel urged it."

"How is he?"

"Very ill; fatally, we fear."

"Indeed? And Lionel—how does he bear it?"

She flashed at him a quick glance. What

a curious question for him to ask! How much of her husband's life did Harry Best know? There was a look in his eyes that she could not read. She hesitated a moment, then replied:

"He is very anxious. He scarcely leaves the child at all. Has your earl been taken to him?"

"I did not desire it. My call was upon you alone."

"That is kind. You have not yet told me about Bessie. When did you see her? Is she quite well?"

"Yes; but it is a singular wish of hers to remain there in the country when her companion has gone. I should think it would be lonely for her."

"Her companion gone? She did not tell us."

"No. Did you ever see her?"

"Bessie's companion? No. She was engaged some time after we left. Why did she leave, do you know?"

"I do not. There was some sort of a mystery about her going. She disappeared very suddenly just about the time that Bessie received word that Lionel was expected to arrive."

Violet started. A sudden pallor, even greater than before, overspread her face. Best, ever quick to read expression, saw and understood that she knew more of her husband than he expected. Dared he trust her? Had he not better make her a partner in his plans for Lionel without exposing the interest that he himself had in them?

"And did his expected arrival cause her flight, do you think?" asked Violet, affecting a laugh. "Poor Lionel! It is the first time I ever heard of any of the fair sex running from him."

The laugh, more than the sudden start, convinced Best that she knew a great deal. "Some more of that imbecile's infernal foolishness!" he ejaculated, mentally. "There is nothing in the line of insanity that he is not liable to do!"

A loud he exclaimed:

"It is a change for the better from his youth, is it not? Lionel was strangely wild when he was a boy. He did a number of foolish things that almost broke his mother's heart. I wonder if he has made a clean breast of it, so to speak, and told you of all his early follies?"

He looked at her peculiarly. In that glance she knew that he meant that folly which had wrecked Lionel's life—that this man was in the secret.

"Yes," she answered, honestly. "He has told me all the past."

Best was silent for a moment; then he drew his chair nearer to Violet, and looked her full in the face.

"I believe you know," he said, earnestly, "that I am not a man to have come here to-day, and have spoken to you in the manner in which I have, without an object. I am not a man to pry into the affairs of another without the deepest reasons. You believe that, do you not, Mrs. Warrender?"

"Yes, though I don't know that I exactly follow you. Have you come here to tell me a secret of my husband's past?"

Her heart was beating almost to suffocation, but she was strangely quiet.

"No," he answered, "I should not have told you if you had not known. But you do. Lionel has told you."

"You mean—"

She hesitated and looked at him.

"Yes, I mean the unhappy secret connected with that child. I wonder how far one dare trust you, Mrs. Warrender? I wonder if you are one of the ridiculously heroic of earth's daughters, such as your sister is? I wonder if you would take up the

sceptre in favour of fancied right, when it would bring destruction to yourself?"

He paused. Violet looked at him in breathless silence. She could not fail to understand. Dared she trust him at all? And if at all, how far?

"You must explain yourself more clearly," she faltered.

But Best was not slow to see that she fully comprehended him. He leaned over further until she almost felt his breath upon her cheeks.

"May I trust you to be sensible?" he asked.

"Yes," she whispered.

"If you were to find that your life was threatened, what would you do—talk religion to the person or blow his brains out?"

"The latter, I fear, if the weapon was in my hands."

"And if you discovered that a great disgrace was about to befall you, would you save yourself from it at any cost, or pause to consider whether the other person had the greater right?"

"I should save myself."

Her voice was hoarse to the verge of the uncanny. He drew his chair even closer. His tones were not lifted above a whisper.

"I have played a dangerous part, Mrs. Warrender," he exclaimed, hurriedly; "but, thank Heaven! I was not mistaken. I have a sensible woman to deal with, and have won. I am deeply, vitally interested in the welfare of your husband. There is not time to go into the reasons for, and analysis of, this feeling, but that it is as strong as life itself I confess. I want to serve you, and thereby serve him. You know the secret of his life."

"Let us be frank and perfectly clear," she cried. "You mean of his marriage, do you?"

"Yes," interrupted Best, hastily; "Do you know the true history of everyone under your own roof?"

She drew back from him for a moment.

"Let me speak clearly, then. For Heaven's sake, be careful! This slightest exclamation may betray all. Did you ever suspect that that woman might not be dead?"

"You mean that she is alive and under my roof at present? That is it, is it not?"

"I have suspected it, feared it. I have had detectives at work day and night. There is a nurse in your house now who—"

"Is in disguise," interrupted Violet, hastily.

"I discovered it to-day."

"Does Lionel know?"

"No."

"Then, for Heaven's sake, take care that he does not find out. Everything depends upon that. Mrs. Warrender, that woman must be made to disappear."

Violet clasped her hands closely.

"I don't know why I trust you," she cried out, hoarsely. "It is a frightful thing, yet you seem so in earnest that I cannot but believe that you mean me no wrong."

"Upon my soul, ho!" exclaimed Best, with a vehemence that no one could doubt. "I believed you to be a woman of sense, and in my dilemma came to you. I am more than gratified to see that I was not mistaken. Now, Mrs. Warrender, will you try to trust me fully, and do as I say?"

"Yes."

"Then you must help me. This woman must disappear. Assist me to place her in my possession, and your connection with the affair with cease. I promise you that neither you nor your husband shall ever hear of her again. Do you consent? You see, I can do nothing in this house without the co-operation of your mother. I preferred you."

"I am glad you did. You may count upon me."

"That is well! I don't want Lionel to see me here, and must go at once. Take the

greatest care that he suspects nothing, and be sure you arrange it so that any letter I may send will be delivered to you in person."

"I shall take care."

"Then au revoir."

CHAPTER XLVI.

Violet Warrender herself met Doctor Hastings at the door upon the occasion of his call upon Norton that afternoon.

It was growing dark when he came, and she had been sitting by the window watching for him for more than an hour, an attention that Violet had never shown to anyone in her life before; but Doctor Hastings was not aware of the honour that she had done him. He thought it an accident, and she did not deceive him.

"I am so glad you have come," she said to him, with her sweetest smile. "That grim little nurse that you have placed with Norton will not allow anyone to enter his room, and I want to go in and see him, under the shadow of your protecting wing. You will take me, will you not?"

"With pleasure."

"And not allow the little tigress to eat me."

"I promise."

In the hall they were met by Lionel, who smiled with sincere pleasure at seeing his wife beside Hastings.

"This is so good of you, dear," he said below his breath, pressing her arm against his side. "It is a token of absolute forgiveness, is it not?"

"Absolute," she answered, without looking at him.

"And eternal?"

"Eternal."

"Thank Heaven!"

The three noiselessly entered the sick-room together, and Brenda arose to receive them. She started somewhat when she saw that Violet was with them, but made no comment. It is not liable to do!

"How is your patient, Miss French?" Doctor Hastings asked in a low voice.

She tried to answer steadily, but there was a catch in her voice which she could not entirely control when she replied:

"Much better, doctor. The change has come at last. The child is rational. I apprehend no more danger, if the nursing is what it should be."

A slight infinitesimal and thanksgiving fell from Lionel's lips. He put out his hand and grasped Brenda's with an emotion of which his friends would have deemed him incapable.

"I am sure Doctor Hastings will forgive me when I say that we owe it all to you," he cried tremulously. "I don't know how I can ever express my gratitude, but you have won a lifelong friend by your zeal and devotion. God bless you!"

And Violet was more convinced than ever that Lionel knew nothing of this woman's identity, however close to the truth she might have guessed.

She but too well understood his delight in the recovery of the child. It was not so much because the baby was his, but because his mother was the woman whom he had loved. She had shamed that the child might die, yet this woman had risen from the dead to step in and save him, and now she had them both to content against! And yet Violet did not accept the lesson that the situation contained. She read it correctly enough, but there was no repentance in her heart, but only a lasting bitterness that nothing could ever sweeten.

A hard line came in the corners of her mouth, and Brenda, with a swift glance in her direction, saw it.

The nurse understood perfectly that Violet had said nothing to Lionel of her discovery of the disguise, and she was grateful for the silence, which she attributed to different motives from the true one. She watched them as they stood side by side. She saw Lionel's little attentions to Violet, and she would have been more than woman had she not contrasted them with those of former days, when she stood in Violet's place.

And this was but a counterfeit of that—and such a poor one! Was it remarkable that a great throb of joy filled her heart as she noted the fact?

They stood by the child's side, while the doctor took his temperature and reported him doing well, then together, Lionel and the doctor, left the room, but Violet remained behind.

She turned coldly to Brenda, when the door had closed upon them.

"I have thought over the circumstances of this case," she said coldly, "and it seems to me that if I am not to expose you, there is but one course to pursue to allow you to remain until there is some reason for sending you away without giving the true one. You will, therefore, keep your place, and do exactly as you have done, until you hear from me on the subject."

"Thank you, madame."

"I shall remain in the room myself a great deal, as it will not surprise you that I cannot fully trust you; but at the same time, you shall have entire charge as usual. You agree to that?"

"Certainly, madame. It may not be necessary that I should remain much longer. The assistant can take my place without danger to the child. I shall speak to Doctor Hastings in the morning of placing me elsewhere. I shall have the excuse that the baby is growing rapidly better and there is no longer the actual necessity of my remaining. That will meet with your approval, will it not, madame?"

"Perfectly."

Violet left the room, and ten minutes later a messenger was dispatched to Harry Best with a report of the conversation.

"If there is anything to be done, it must be done at once," the note said. "I am sure that Lionel suspects nothing; but there is not a moment to be lost."

The messenger that delivered it carried back an answer which somewhat allayed Violet's restlessness; still she glanced nervously at the clock every time it tolled an hour. As it was striking eight, the bell rang. She had gone to her own room, and as she heard the front door open, she stepped into the hall and listened intently.

"Does Miss French live here?" she heard a messenger ask.

"Yes," the servant replied.

"Here is a note for her."

The servant signed the slip, and the messenger went down the steps, whistling an air from an opera.

Violet drew back into the shadow of her own room as the servant passed her on the way to the sick-room. He delivered his message, and in a little while a knock sounded upon her door.

She opened it herself. It was her maid.

"Miss French wishes to see you for a moment, madame," she said. "Will you go to Norton's room, or shall she come here?"

"I will go there," answered Violet, passing her at once, and entering the room where Brenda waited.

"Madame," Brenda said, quietly, "I have received a note from Doctor Hastings. Will you kindly read it?"

Violet took the note from her and cast her eye over the contents. It read:

"Dear Miss French,—After all your trouble and sleeplessness of late, it seems a pity to disturb you just when your patient is getting to a point where you can take a little of the rest of which you so greatly stand in need; but I have no choice but to call upon you for a great favour. I have a patient who is very ill—the worst case, in fact, that I have had yet—a little girl. I cannot get a nurse, and dare not leave her without, as there would not be the slightest hope of her life. Little Norton is getting along well, and can do under the care of the assistant to-night. Will you come to me? You may return to Mr. Warrender to-morrow, when I have had an opportunity to secure another nurse; but you must not refuse to-night. A human life depends upon it. A cab, which will be at your door, will bring you to me."

"Yours in haste,"

"W. G. HASTINGS."

"Well?" said Violet, indifferently, when she had finished the perusal of the note and handed it back.

"Have I your permission to go?"

"Certainly, if you think it safe for Norton."

"I shall return to-morrow morning, madame, and remain for a day or two longer. The nurse has taken care of Norton while I have slept, and this will be nothing more than that."

"Then you may go. Good-night."

She left the room, and Brenda turned to the baby. She kissed him good-night as if she were going from him for a month, then calling the nurse in, gave her instructions for the night, after which she put on her hat, and leaving her change of clothing in the room that had been hers while she remained in the house, she went quietly down stairs.

Lionel was not visible, and even had he been, there would have been no alteration of her plans.

"You know the address to which you are to go?" she asked of the cabman.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Then drive fast."

It was quite a distance; in fact, they had left the lights of the city behind when the driver began to rein in. Brenda was growing frightened, but calmed her fears with the knowledge that the contagion had reached further than the limits of the town. She alighted when the cab stopped, and a man was there to receive her. The front door of a red-bricked house opened, and, by the dim light that was cast upon the man, Brenda recognised Harry Best.

Some suspicion of foul play, that in nowise embraced Violet Warrender, dawned upon her. She shrank back.

"You!" she exclaimed. "Where is Doctor Hastings?"

"Inside. Will you come in?"

She followed, believing that he had not recognised her, but that she had almost betrayed herself by her exclamation.

The door closed behind her with a slam, and the great chains and bolts were securely fastened. She stood there breathlessly, looking about her for Doctor Hastings; but there was no one even remotely like him there. A man, evidently a medical man, bowed as Harry Best presented her.

"This is your new patient, Doctor Frith—Miss Brenda," he said, quietly.

The doctor bowed kindly, and from the appearance of the place the truth became but too apparent to Brenda.

She was an inmate of a lunatic asylum!

CHAPTER XLVII.

If either Doctor Frith or Harry Best expected a scene, they were disappointed.

Brenda stood for a moment staring at the bolts and bars with which she was surrounded, transfixed with surprise; then she said, quietly:

"May I ask, Doctor Frith, where I am?"

"You are where you will receive kindly treatment," he answered, gently. "I hope you will not object to remaining. Mr. Best tells me that you are not well, but we hope to remedy all that with time."

"Let me understand perfectly," she exclaimed, without excitement, but in some wonderment. "If I am not mistaken, this is a lunatic asylum, is it not?"

"Yes," said Doctor Frith, with much surprise at the calm question.

"And I am entered here as an inmate?"

"You are," answered Best, coming to the doctor's relief.

"May I ask if it is customary in this country to deprive persons of their liberty in this manner? To incarcerate them in asylums without commitments of any kind?"

"Your commitment was in regular form, Miss Goodwin," said Doctor Frith. "There are the signatures of two reputable physicians attached to it."

"Then I must tell you, sir, that neither of those two men ever saw me. I have received no examination either as to my mental or physical condition, and I cannot understand what this gentleman can have to do with it, when I never saw him but once before to my knowledge."

Best glanced significantly at the doctor.

"You are not brought here for any harm," he said, with an assumption of gentleness. "If you will remain quietly, none shall befall you."

"I have no idea of creating a disturbance," answered Brenda, coldly. "I am quite aware that I am caught in the net that you have prepared for me—why, I am unable to say. I know as well as you could tell me how powerless I am to cope with you in your own dominion. I am not looking about for windows from which to escape, because I know it would be worse than useless."

"Will you remove that disguise, Miss Goodwin?" asked Best, with another glance at Doctor Frith.

"Certainly," she replied.

She untied and removed her bonnet, then calmly took the gray wig from her black locks.

"Now, perhaps you will make some explanation of this to me," she said, frigidly, to Best.

She dared not frame the horrible thought that was burning into her brain, that this man had abducted her because of some diabolical scheme that he had formed of his own, and a glance into his face was almost enough to dispel all such ideas. He turned to Doctor Frith and spoke to him in a low tone.

"Will you leave me with her for a few moments alone?" he asked.

Doctor Frith bowed.

He opened the door of a small reception-room, allowed them to pass through, then the door closed behind them. Once inside, Brenda turned formally to Best.

"Now that the doctor is here no longer, and you can speak freely without his discovering the shameful cheat that you have put upon him, perhaps you will tell me the truth of this affair."

"There is nothing to tell," answered Best. "There are reasons why it is necessary for you to remain here for a time. I promise you that you shall not be uncomfortable, and that you shall be perfectly safe. The

liberty of the grounds will be open to you, the only demand made being that you do not attempt to go out without an attendant. I promise you that you shall have no cause to complain, provided you say nothing; that you remain here in silence until such time as I can take you away."

"And may I ask what all this is for?"

"No, because I could not answer you. I don't want you to look upon me as the terrible villain of a play, Miss Goodwin, that abducts young girls for the mere pleasure of wickedness. Remain where you are without question or attempted escape, and I give you my word of honour that it shall all be explained to you in time."

"You will, no doubt, excuse me if I am frank enough to doubt the honour of a man who can perpetrate the outrage that you have done; but you are speaking entirely without reason. I am still absolutely in the dark regarding your intentions, but there is one thing about which you need not be alarmed. I don't know what it is that you wish me to keep silent about, but there is nothing for me to tell, and, consequently, I shall tell nothing."

Best looked at her curiously.

"What did it mean?" he asked himself.

"Was it possible that she had not meant to lay claim to the husband that was rightfully hers?" He could not believe it. It was but a ruse.

He arose quietly.

"Then you will remain here without trouble?" he asked.

"Certainly, if I am forced to remain at all."

"And you will allow me to see you when I call?"

"Not if I can help it, though I shall do nothing special to avoid it."

"Thank you, and good-night. I have selected a room where you shall be alone at night, quite apart from the others. I am sure that is as you would wish it. If there is anything that I can do for you at any time, you have only to speak to Doctor Frith, and he will write me. You are to be denied nothing while you are here that can add to your comfort. Do what Doctor Frith advises without question or comment. In that way you will save yourself trouble in the future."

Brenda bowed. The expression of her face had not changed in any way. It was still as if it had been chiseled from marble.

"It is useless to make a plea to you for my liberty, I am sure," she said, slowly. "I should not have been brought here had you intended to release me; therefore I remain silent. But there is one thing which I am going to request you to do for me, distasteful as it is to me to make such a request."

"Anything that I can do, you may be sure I shall."

"Then send a note for me to Doctor Hastings. You may be sure I should not be fool enough to write him anything that would betray my position to him, for I should be only too sure that it would never reach him. Will you do it?"

"With pleasure."

He rang for a servant and ordered writing materials; then, when they had been brought, Brenda wrote:

"Dear Doctor Hastings,—I have found it necessary to leave the city for a few days. I cannot tell you how I regret deserting you when I know my services are so much needed; but in this instance I am not my own mistress nor director. It is compulsory. I can frame no words to thank you for your great kindness to me in the past, and shall hope some day to tell you all the occur-

rences that have called me away at a time like this.

"I have left full instructions for the night about Norton Warrender, but for no longer. I scarcely think the assistant capable of taking entire charge of him for a day or two yet, and entreat you, if Miss Graham has sufficiently recovered, to place him under her care, for a few days, at any rate."

"Think as kindly of me as you can, and believe always that, however appearances may be against me, I am deeply grateful for all your kindness to me,

"Yours always sincerely,

"A. FRENCH."

She handed the sheet to Best for him to read, knowing that if she did not, he would read it without her leave when he had left her. He rapidly cast his eye over it, then handed it back.

"If you will seal and address it, I shall see that it reaches its destination in safety," he said.

She did so, and Best slipped it into his pocket.

"Good-night," he said, extending his hand.

She put hers behind her back.

"I cannot take the hand of a scoundrel in mine," she said, haughtily.

"I regret that you must think so badly of me. I hope you will not make yourself unhappy over your surroundings."

He left her after that, and for some time she sat there alone, staring at the floor. She was striving to think out the position.

"He knows me," she said aloud, at last. "He knew me that day at Rimsview, and neither Bessie nor I succeeded in deceiving him. Now, what does it mean? Does he know that I am really Lionel's wife? What is he to Lionel? Has he brought me here for reasons of his own, or has—good God! Lionel cannot have suspected and—oh! shame! shame! Have I not done him wrong enough already, without suspecting him of a scheme like that? Heaven forgive me! I must bear it in silence until I know. At least I am safe here. The surroundings are horrible; but, fortunately, I am not of a nervous disposition, and I can bear it. I am safe, and I can wait."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

With his engagement to Bessie, Darcy Brooke's perplexity about the situation in which Lionel Warrender was placed did not by any means abate. On the contrary, he thought day and night of how it would be possible for him to extricate his friend from so dreadful a position without bringing eternal disgrace upon an innocent family.

But at the end of the week he seemed to have arrived at no more definite conclusion than he had upon the first day of his ghastly discovery that Violet Warrender was no wife.

He did not wish to distress Bessie with it, but she would not be silenced. He had never confessed to her the truth of the situation, and therefore could not advise with her, but the time was reaching its limit when something must be done. He could not allow Violet to go on living in that horrible state with a man whose wife she was not, and yet—and yet the old question came again—what was he to do?

"Is Lionel never to know of this?" Bessie asked of him one day. "Are you going to make no effort to find Brenda? Oh, Darcy! I am ashamed that in my own great selfish happiness I have allowed you to neglect this for so long. It must be done, and at once."

Brooke chewed the end of his moustache in silence for a moment, then said, thoughtfully:

"I have been weighing it all in every conceivable direction, and I can't decide what ought to be done. That is, I know what ought to be done, but I can't make up my mind to do it."

"But you must! Whatever is right must be done. It is a moral obligation. It is a duty."

"That is all beautiful in theory, my darling, but there is a mighty strong duty that we owe to the world as well as to Heaven. It is impossible to always do just what is right; and, while I recognise that it is neither a moral nor a Christian thing to say, still it is true, that I don't believe Heaven expects us always to do just as we ought. I have turned the affair over in every conceivable direction, and I have come to the conclusion that I am not equal to the situation."

"Then what are you going to do?"

"I have thought of going to Lionel's mother, of laying all the circumstances in the case before her, and asking her advice. She loves him, yet she can appreciate every side of the unfortunate predicament."

"It is just the thing!" cried Bessie, excitedly; "I wonder that neither of us thought of it before."

"Then you approve that plan?"

"Decidedly."

Brooke seemed to breathe more freely. At least it would relieve him of something of the terrible responsibility that was resting on him.

"Then," he exclaimed, rising, "I think I shall go down this afternoon. Shall you be very lonely without me, dearest?"

She smiled at him with tremulous happiness.

"I am always lonely when you are not here," she answered; "but I would not detain you when it is right that you should go."

"Then I shall return as soon as possible."

"As soon as you have finished what you go to accomplish, Darcy, not before. I wish you to understand how grateful I am to you for all your tenderness and care, dear. It seems so impossible to me that a strong, young Adonis like you should ever care for a little, helpless, crippled thing such as I. I cannot believe, even yet, but that your pity ran away with your judgment."

He was kneeling beside her, with his handsome curly head in her arms, looking at her with a smile in his eyes.

"Then it ran so far away that it never can come back," he answered. "Can you imagine Psyche without the use of her legs, Bessie? You could if you could see yourself in a mirror as I see you. I love your beauty, darling,—for you are beautiful, very, very, beautiful—and I love your dear, pure soul, and I love your love. There! Is not that enough? A man does not love a woman's walk, does he? It is too ridiculous when one thinks of it. You appeal to my heart, to my soul, to everything that is truest and most manly in me. Is not that enough, dear one?"

"Anything is enough that gives you to me, Darcy. When I think of how empty my life was before, and how filled to overflowing it is now, it seems to me that I can never be sufficiently grateful to God for all His goodness to me. I love you with all my soul!"

"I know it," he answered, simply.

There was nothing of egotism in the reply. On the contrary, it was almost humble. He kissed her tenderly and rose.

"I am going now," he said, quietly. "I half wish you were going with me, but I know that it is best not. Good-bye, darling."

"Good-bye."

He leaned over the back of her chair and implanted a long kiss upon her lips.

"Little wife!" he whispered, tenderly, as his cheek touched hers.

Then he left her, and as he walked out into the warm sunshine he murmured in the depths of his own heart:

(To be continued.)

LITTLE MRS. ENDERSBY.

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(Continued from page 561.)

"You forget," Will remarked, painfully, "that I am a thief."

"I remember only that you have been her true friend in the direst time of her need, and that you are going to restore her to me. You are not the first man who has succumbed to temptation, and that you are her brother is more than sufficient to me. But someone must have been cognisant of your visit here. I am ashamed to say I acted upon the advice of an anonymous writer, and what I saw seemed to be beyond explanation. Who could the writer be—who would aim such a deadly blow at her?"

"Do you really wish to know? It was Miss Abigail Venne; I cannot say how she became aware of our first meeting, but that she was aware of it is very evident, and she used her knowledge to what she hoped would be to her advantage. Honestly, she believed Connie false, and rejoiced to find her so—I need not tell you why."

"I am afraid you need not," answered Mark, looking almost guilty; but no matter what had come, I never could have put another woman in Connie's place. When can we start?"

"Not for a couple of hours yet; and, wait, there is more to tell. I remarked in my story that we had been shamefully driven from our apartments at Birmingham. The same hand that stole away your wife, dealt us that blow."

"By heaven! this is too much," cried Mark, starting to his feet; "if only for an instant she were a man. Carroll, what punishment is cruel enough for such offences?"

"I should let her severely alone; it will prevent much scandal. And now tell me what you have resolved to do?"

"Can there be any question about that. I am going to bring home my wife and child, and not heaven nor earth shall ever come between us any more. Now, let me see to your creature comforts, and believe that any dark deed of your life is to me wholly cancelled by your exceeding goodness to my darling."

Two hours later, as they went towards the station, they saw the solitary figure of a woman pacing up and down. As the dog-cart drew near her, she lifted her eyes to Mark's face with such agonised entreaty that almost Will pitied her; but Mark passed her by with a cold unrecognising stare, and she knew he despised her too deeply to bandy any words with her.

When Will looked back she was leaning against a fence, her hands pressed hard upon her heart, and her face like the face of one dead. Then, slowly gathering all her energies together, she lifted herself erect; and, whilst a sob rose to her lips, muttered: "Mark, Mark!" in tones of deepest anguish; and, dragging her weary feet homewards, sought her own room, there to face the dreadful future.

She could neither sell nor leave her home, it being one of the conditions of her father's will that unless she married she was to reside nine out of every twelve months at Clareville, or forfeit one-half her income, and Abigail loved money, not for money's sake, but for the power it gives. So she must perforce stay on, and even confront her injured rival. How would they meet? And would Connie take swift revenge upon her for all her sins? She looked with strange eyes into her glass.

"My beauty is fading," she said, drearily,

"she is younger than I, and fairer now. Men love youth and beauty."

Connie, weak and weary, lay upon her couch. How late Will was! and a thousand fears for his safety assailed her. She started up when she heard his voice in the hall, his step upon the stairs; then the door opened, and Will entered, looking very radiant.

"I'm awfully late, my dear," he said, in a more cheerful tone than he had used for very long; "but the fact is I have been a journey, and the trains ran awkwardly. Connie, I want you to be very brave now; if I see the least sign of or disposition in you to faint, I will close my narrative almost before I begin it. This morning I went to Clareville—quiet, old lady, or I'll keep my word—and I saw Mark Endersby."

"Wait, only a moment—there, I am steady now—tell me how he looked and what he said. Had he any kindly thought of me? and oh! Will, what of my boy?"

"He will be restored to his birthright."

She drew her breath hard.

"Must I lose my baby, must I?" she wailed, "Oh! it is too cruel; you do not know how he has grown into my very heart."

"You are distressing yourself needlessly; if you are patient you shall hear all. There has been a great and terrible mistake; Mark is no more to blame than yourself, he is even on his way now to tell you all the strange story and pray your forgiveness. He wants not only his boy but his wife."

"Will!" her voice rose to a cry; "Will, is this true? You would not lie to me on a matter of life or death; let me go to him!"

"There is no need, he is here!" said the voice she loved best on earth, and there in the open doorway stood Mark.

Mark, changed and aged, but her husband once again. Looking, she gave one great, glad cry, and leapt to meet him; the next moment she was in his arms, and he was praying brokenly for her forgiveness and her love. She tried to speak, but could not, but she lifted her lips to his and kissed him once upon the mouth; and then her head fell back, and she knew no more for very long, because she had fainted with excess of joy.

When she recovered consciousness her head was upon her husband's breast, and by his side, with wide eyes fixed wonderingly upon his father, stood little Mark.

A month later Mark carried his wife and child back to Clareville; and it was marvellous how quickly Connie recovered strength and her pretty looks under his loving care. When she was able to bear excitement, Mark gave a grand dinner, and then before all his guests he cleared his wife's name from any aspersion, shielding Will, and taking all the blame upon himself; which he could well afford to do, dwelling as now he did in the clear light of perfect happiness.

And Will was well on his solitary way to Brisbane, carrying with him a roll of notes, Mark's parting gift; and as years went by he prospered mightily, and took to himself a wife, who first won his heart because of her fancied resemblance to his beloved Connie.

Abigail still lives alone, and no one has ever guessed the part she played in the drama which was so nearly a tragedy, so that she will live honoured and "die in the odour of sanctity." Only Connie, as she draws her boy close to her, and lifts her loving eyes to Mark's, says:

"All your friends shall be my friends, with the exception of Miss Venne; please do not ask me to receive her."

And he, knowing more than she ever will suspect, gives a ready promise in this and all things to study her wishes.

THE END.

FACETIE.

BRIGHTEST idea of the century—the electric light.

The theatre curtain is caught in the act, but is let down easy in the end.

SOME cheap perfumes are not to be sniffed at.

It isn't much trouble for a man to make his mark in politics. The trouble is in removing it.

PROPER respect for some persons is best preserved by avoiding their neighbourhood.

A VOTER praising a candidate at a recent election, said, "He is as fine a fellow as ever lifted a hat to a lady or a boot to a scoundrel."

WHY do birds feel depressed early in a summer morning? Because their little bills are all over dew.

THE POINT OF VIEW.—"Upon Downes is very fast, isn't he?" "His tailor says not. Says he's very slow."

"I know now," remarked the young man who was sued for breach of promise, "why they call it 'courting.'"

LOVE at first sight is easy enough; what a girl wants is a man that can love her when he sees her every day.

THE mean man likes the magazine that tells woman how to dress on nothing a year and look well.

"You were always a fault-finder," growled the wife. "Yes, dear," responded the husband, meekly; "I found you."

AN Irishman had only one son that showed him filial affection, and that one never struck him when he was down.

TWO STYLES OF CONSOLATION.—A man's—"Just what I expected." A woman's—"I told you how it would be."

"WE'RE in a pickle now," said a man in a crowd. "A regular jam," said another. "Heaven preserve us!" moaned an old lady.

"DOCTOR, what is a good cholera mixture for this time of year?" "Well, ice cream, water-melon and lager beer will do very well."

CONSCIENCE.—Sunday School Teacher: "What is the conscience?" Bright Boy: "It's what makes you sorry when you get found out."

ALGERNON: "Tommy, do you think your sister would marry me?" Tommy: "Yes. She'd marry almost anybody, from what she said to me."

"DID the older brother give the bride away?" asked Maud. "Yes; but the little one threatened to if his supply of cake ran short," Jack replied.

TRAMP: Could you give a poor man a bite or two without much trouble?" Housewife: I can. Joe! unchain Nero and take his muzzle off."

"HANS, you mustn't go bathing to-day, as you have the stomach-ache." "Oh, that won't make any difference, pa; I can swim on my back, you know."

"THE only thing that I am superstitious about," remarked Barlow, "is to return home from the club after one o'clock and find my wife awake. It is a sure sign of ill-luck."

TEACHER: "No living being can read your writing. Why don't you try to learn?" Little Boy: "No use. I'm going to be a doctor, like papa."

"IT must be dreadful when a professional singer knows that she has lost her voice!" "But it is still more dreadful when she is not aware of the fact!"

"THE way to succeed," said the rich philosopher, "is to begin right, my boy." "I suppose you mean that I should have been born rich, as you were," said the young man.

A MYSTERY on a sign at a South End provision store: "Beef is very high, our prices are the same." The question is, does the sign attract or repel customers?

OLD Friend: "To tell you the truth, George, this house you're in now is no great shakes." George (grimly): "Wait till you've slept in it through a storm."

"WILL you love me when I'm old?" simpered gay Miss Oldgirl to her youthful intended. "Why, my darling, I do," responded he in mild surprise.

MR. LITTLETON: "Well, it takes two to make a quarrel, so I'll shut up." Mrs. Littleton: "Just like you, you mean, miserable man. You'll just sit there and think ugly things."

FLATTERING.—Every baby is the sweetest baby in the world. You were once considered the sweetest thing in the world, although you may not look it now.

"I've brought you home an English pug, my dear," said the fond papa. "Oh, you dear, good papa," exclaimed the enraptured daughter, "it's just like you."

"How did Ajax defy the lightning?" said one young man to another. "I don't know. Perhaps he talked impertinently to the telegraph operator at the hotel."

"LOVE is blind," which is why he always seeks the seclusion of the darkest corner of the piazza in preference to the painful light of the front parlour on warm evenings in the country.

FRANK FRANKLEIGH: "Yes, Miss Antique, to be frank with you—" Miss Antique (with a chirp): "Oh, Mr. Frankleigh, of course you may be frank with me, but this is so sudden."

EDITOR: "How is it that in your report of the fire last night you used the expression, 'They soaked it to the flames?'" REPORTER: "It was because the fire department had only short hose to use."

TATTLE: "I see you everywhere with Miss Mennibow, nowadays. You seem to be very friendly with her, but you don't say much about it." Ratter: "No. Wherever I go I find you have saved me the trouble."

A PESSIMIST declares that the pleasures of vacation consist in thinking beforehand what a fine time you are going to have and in reflecting afterward how much worse a time you might have had.

A MERCHANT being asked to define the meaning of experimental and natural philosophy, said he considered the first to be asking a man to discount a bill at a long date, and the second his refusing to do it.

"OUGHT a husband to keep his wife informed of his business affairs?" asks an innocent. There is no necessity. She will find out five times as much as he knows himself without the least trouble.

"DID you," he inquired, in an intensely sentimental tone, "never sigh for death?" "Whose?" she inquired, with an interest and promptness that brought him back to earth so fast that he fairly lost his breath.

LADY (to gentleman who had just fallen down stairs): "Good Heavens, how he frightened me! I thought it was my husband who fell down." Gentleman: "I wish to goodness it had been. I am as much disappointed as you are."

LITTLE PIR: "I dess those biscuits mamma made was dest wight, wasn't they?" Papa: "Yes, they were delicious." "I didn't try 'em, but I knew they was." "You did? How?" "You didn't say a word about 'em."

IT was a bright Boston schoolgirl who, when asked by her teacher to explain the meaning of the Shakespearean phrase "Go to!" exclaimed: "Oh, that is only the 16th century's expression of the nineteenth century's 'Come off!'"

CITIZEN: "What's up?" Policeman: "O'm knocking fur help, an' ringing fur an ambulance." Citizen: "What's the matter?" Policeman: "O! just saw two Oytalians smiling at th' same woman."

A YOUNG man advertised for a wife, and his sister answered the advertisement; and now the young man thinks there is no balm in advertisements, and the old people think it pretty hard to have two fools in one family.

"PAW," said little Tommy Figg, on being scolded, "I heard Mr. Watts say that great men's sons never did any good. I ain't a great man's son, am I?" Up to a late hour Mr. Figg's mind had not found a sufficiently diplomatic answer.

DEDUCE: "That man called me a liar, a cad, a scoundrel and a puppy. Would you advise me to fight for that?" Old gent: "By all means. There's nothing nobler in this world, young man, than fighting for the truth."

BULLFINCH: "How is that little mining scheme of yours getting along? Any money for it?" Wooden: "Any money in it! Well, I should say so! All of mine, all of my wife's, and about fifty thousand that I got from my friends."

ADVANTAGES OF EDUCATION.—"Why, Bridget," exclaimed the housewife, "I can write my name in the dust there!" "Dead, ma'am," replied Bridget, admiringly, "that's more now I can do. There's nothing loike education after all, is there, ma'am?"

"AND who would have thought that I should ever be the mother of a poet?" exclaimed Mrs. Plainfield, proudly. "Oh, well, I wouldn't worry about that!" replied her neighbour, misunderstanding: "He'll have better sense when he's older."

"IS not the price of a penny bun always a penny?" asked a schoolmaster, admonishing a pupil for his dulness of comprehension. "No, sir," the boy innocently replied, "because when they are stale they sell them two for three-halfpence."

THEY were talking to Guibollard of the rise of the Seine, when he cried, "It is all a humbug! I went to Chateau yesterday; the water seems to have risen, but it is a mere deception." "How so?" "I had chalked a mark on my boat, and it's in the same place yet."

JOHNSON: "What did Hobson say about my play?" DOBSON: "He said he certainly felt that he had got the worth of his money." JOHNSON: "Anything else?" DOBSON: "Oh, yes; he asked me to thank you for the complimentary ticket you sent him."

SERVANT (delivering message): "Mr. Triplett sends his compliments to Mr. Gazzam with the request that he shoot his dog, which is a nuisance in the neighbourhood." Mr. Gazzam: "Give Mr. Gazzam's compliments to Mr. Triplett and ask him to kindly poison his daughter or burn up her piano."

AN exchange says that a lady, who was looking about in a bric-a-brac shop with a view to purchasing something odd, noticed a quaint figure, the head and shoulders of which appeared above the counter. "What is that Japanese idol over there worth?" she inquired. The salesman, replied in a subdued tone, "Worth about half a million, madam; it's the proprietor."

A SCENE in a picture-gallery shows a man who serves as a model for an artist, and, in the artist's absence, explains the picture to a lady visitor. "From whom did Mr. McGlip paint that head?" "From yours obediently, madam. I sit for the 'eds of all 'is old men." "He must find you a very useful person." "Yes, madam; I order his frames, stretch his canvas, wash all his brushes, set his palette, and mix his colours. All he's got to do is to shove 'em on."

A LONG WORD.—Mr. Whympy, in a paper upon Greenland in an old number of the *Alpine Journal*, characterises the Eskimo language as "sententious." A single word, he says, is made to convey an idea which in English would require a full sentence. Of such words he offers one example—a word meaning "You must try much to get a good knife." Here it is: Savecenearetoresooaratarloramaronatetok. Mr. Whympy does not indicate how this precious polysyllable is to be pronounced, and we must leave our readers to exercise their own discretion upon that point.

"YOU have some fine ducks this morning," said the kindly old schoolmaster to a poultryer. "Yes, sir, all fresh to-day." "What is the price?" "You can take your choice, sir; I have them at all prices." "Well, I want to give my boys a treat, but I do not want them to be too tender. There are a dozen here—pick out four of the toughest." The poultryer obeyed. "Here, sir, you have four of the toughest birds in my shop." "Thank you, sir," said the schoolmaster; "I'll take the other eight."

SOCIETY.

CHARLES II. was a writer of shorthand.

Two centuries ago, the first gentlemen of England habitually wore their hats while eating.

THE Queen treats the Empress Eugénie as a fellow Sovereign, never forgetting that they used to meet on terms of perfect equality.

THE Emperor of Austria possesses more Royal palaces and castles than any other European Sovereign, except the King of Italy.

THE Princess of Wales and Princess Victoria and Maud of Wales have shown their appreciation of Sandringham in summer by going back there instead of going abroad.

THE Pope is an ardent lover of Nature and a poet of no mean order, as well as a remarkably keen observer.

THE Emperor of China chooses his own successor, whether the person chosen is a member of the royal family or not.

QUEEN VICTORIA has mastered the Hindustanee language, in learning which she has shown a great deal of interest and spent considerable time.

QUEEN VICTORIA has, like other women, her pet superstitions, one of which is the belief that anything made by a blind person brings luck. Accordingly the cradle with all its furnishings for the latest Battenberg baby has been prepared entirely by the blind.

ACCORDING to present arrangements the Duchess of Buccleuch will continue to act as Mistress of the Robes, but without salary. This is by the Queen's wish, and Mr. Gladstone raised no objection.

THE Princess of Wales has not yet recovered from the awful shock inflicted upon her nervous system by the sudden death of her eldest son. The Princess was so shocked, and even terrified, at the beginning of the year, that her nerves have not yet, it seems, recovered from the blow.

IT is satisfactory to hear that the Prince of Wales is looking tanned and strong again, and that he is beginning to lose that depressed air which has been the cause of so much anxiety to his friends.

IN China a wife is never spoken of by her husband in a plain and straightforward way. Some playful terms as "my thorn in the ribs" and "my dull companion" are more usual, but leave something to be desired on the score of elegance. "The man one of the sunnier room" has a distinct flavour of masculine selfishness about it.

THE Duchess of Edinburgh's visit to the Prince and Princess of Wales was undertaken in order to introduce Princess Marie of Edinburgh to the Queen of Roumania (Caroline Sylva). Their Royal Highnesses found the Queen much better, and her Majesty took so much to Princess Marie that any remaining prejudice against her nephew's engagement that she had cherished has now vanished, and she expresses herself as being very pleased with the whole matter.

WOMEN have for some time invaded the smoking-room, particularly in country houses; but feeling that in some cases they have been admitted only on sufferance, many feminine smokers have retaliated by establishing a ladies' smoking-room in opposition to the masculine apartment. The difficulty is now to keep the cigar-smokers out of the regions of the cigarette. Ladies smoking-suits are now *de rigueur*, the most appropriate being made of material of the colour of tobacco-leaf.

THE Queen has rather suffered in health from the recent extreme heat, but will, no doubt, be soon put right by the bracing air of Upper Decade. Osborne is by no means a desirable abode in hot summer weather, and, indeed, the air of the Solent is always too relaxing for the Queen, who invariably gets somewhat out of health after a few weeks' residence in the Isle of Wight. There is a glare about Osborne in sultry weather which is very trying.

STATISTICS.

CHLORAL was discovered by Liebig in 1831.

THE average man has 2,304,000 pores in his skin.

THE first post-office opened its doors in Paris, 1482; in England, in 1581; in America, 1710.

PAPER from rags was made in 1000 A.D., the first linen paper in 1310, and paper from straw in 1800.

THE fastest passage between New York and Queenstown, both eastward and westward, was made in the latter part of 1891 by the steamship *Teutonic* of the White Star Line. The fastest passage from Queenstown to New York was made in August, being five days, sixteen hours and thirty-one minutes. The fastest passage from New York to Queenstown was made in October, being five days, twenty-one hours and three minutes.

GEMS.

HAPPINESS is an art, and we have to learn how to be happy, just as we have to learn how to be good.

YOU cannot borrow time. There is no interest accumulating on the days as we pass them by. Every night the account is closed.

THE best way to prove the clearness of our mind is by showing its faults; as when a stream discovers the dirt at the bottom, it convinces us of the transparency of the water.

WE never detect how much of our social demeanour is made up of artificial airs, until we see a person who is at once beautiful and simple; without the beauty, we are apt to call simplicity awkwardness.

WE are ruined not by what we really want, but by what we think we want. Therefore never go abroad in search of your wants; if they be real wants, they will come home in search of you. For he that buys what he does not want will soon want what he cannot buy.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

VICTORIA PUDDING.—1lb marrow or suet, 1lb grated bread, 1lb flour, 1lb sugar, 1lb raisins, 1lb skin orange peel cut into pieces, a very little grated nutmeg, a pinch of salt, 2 tablespoonfuls of jam; 4 eggs. Mix all the dry things together, stir in the jam, beat up the eggs, mix in the milk, stir all together and put into a buttered shape, to steam for 2 hours.

ENGLISH SCONES.—1lb. of flour, half a teaspoonful of tartaric acid, half a teaspoonful of baking soda, two teaspoonfuls of sugar, one and a half teaspoonfuls of butter, sweet milk. Put all the dry ingredients into a basin, rub the butter amongst them; then add the milk, and turn the dough out on a floured board; knead a little, and make it into a nice round cake, roll it out, and cut it into round shapes, brush them over with milk; bake in the oven for ten minutes.

DAMSON CHEESE.—Stalk the fruit, and put the latter into the preserving-pan, simmer it gently till soft, stirring it now and again; then rub all through a coarse sieve, and weigh both pulp and juice, allowing half a pound of sugar to each pound of fruit-pulp, &c. Stir the sugar thoroughly into the fruit, and let it all simmer again gently for two hours. Skim it well, and then boil the preserve quickly for half an hour, or until it jellies firmly on being lifted in the spoon. Pour it quickly into shallow moulds or pots, and, when cold, cover with oiled papers, and then lay white paper brushed over with white of egg right over the pots. A few of the kernels boiled with the fruit improve the flavour immensely.

MISCELLANEOUS.

LIVERPOOL is the largest shipping port in the world.

THE game of chess is taught in all the Austrian public schools.

A CURIOUS industry in Paris is that of selling toads to gardeners, to be used as insect destroyers.

SIBERIA is said to be a country of enormous natural wealth which no effort has yet been made to develop.

THE size of rain-drops varies from a speck so small as to be almost invisible up to a diameter of two inches.

GERMAN railway directors are experimenting with rails made of paper, which are said to be as superior to steel rails as paper car-wheels are to those of iron.

IF a woman wishes to summon a child from a long distance, she prolongs the last syllable of the name and emphasizes it; if a man is calling, accent and emphasis are placed on the first syllable.

THE colours most frequently confused by the colour-blind people are pink and yellow, confounded with grass-green, blue and violet with purple or rose, and dark-green or light-green with red.

RATS and mice are found almost everywhere on the earth's surface except in the central portions of the African and Australian continents and in the cold regions of the extreme north and south. Bats, too, are widely distributed, and are, indeed, found everywhere in the tropical and temperate portions of the world.

THE method of curing hay in Norway is peculiar. In driving along the highway one notices out in the midst of a field ten or a dozen lengths of post and rail fence in a straight line. What is the object of the fences? When the grass is cut, it is laid over these rails, tier above tier, to dry. In the curing process it has the benefit of the wind as well as sun; and, in case of rain, the water runs off readily. The colour of the hay is nearly as bright a green as the standing grass.

ONLY three or four inches in length, the sea-horse is more dignified than many large fishes, and in addition to the distinction conferred upon it by its graceful stateliness, possesses the unique power of looking two ways at once. It is a dainty, pretty creature, with head shaped much like a horse. In colour, it is pale gray, dotted with tiny, scarcely visible spots of blue, and small silver spangles. The dorsal fins are bordered and fringed with gold; and the strong little prehensile tail, wound around some fixed object selected by the owner, supports him in an erect position in the most wonderful manner.

So far as research has been able to determine, glass was in use 2,000 years before the birth of Christ, and was even then not by any means in its infancy. In the Slade collection at the British Museum there is the head of a lion moulded in glass, bearing the name of an Egyptian king of the eleventh dynasty. This is the oldest specimen of pure glass, bearing anything like a date, now known to exist. The invention now known as "glazing," the mode of varnishing pottery with a thin film of glass, is believed to date back to the Egyptian dynasty. Proof of this is found in tombs of the age above referred to.

A PHYSICIAN to the Throat Hospital, states that a peculiar throat affection is extremely common among teachers in elementary schools, especially women. In a pamphlet written by him on this subject he attributes the chief cause of it to the excessive number of children in the sufferer's class, and the crowding of two or more classes into one room. Another cause is the unskilled rather than the excessive use of the voice, and he recommends that in the training colleges voice-production should be scientifically and practically taught. Dr. Carpenter, in his treatise on school hygiene, also mentions acute laryngitis as not uncommon among teachers.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

PUGA.—Providence is in Rhode Island, U.S.A.

GILPIN.—We know nothing of the firm except that the address given is quite correct.

FOLLY.—If at your age you cannot get the better of such a silly habit, no one can do it for you.

T. P.—There are 3,424 languages and dialects in the world.

TORY.—Mr. Gladstone entered Parliament as a Tory in 1832.

MARINATHA.—Out-door exercise and plenty of good plain food are the only methods of any use.

KITTY.—Police-constables are not eligible for enlistment in the militia.

MAUDE.—Nothing will do any good but a dye, and we do not advise the use of such things.

DOROTHY.—October 17, 1875, was on a Friday. It was not a leap year.

GIPSY.—It is absolutely impossible to say who is entitled unless we know the exact terms of the will.

GLADYS.—Mr. Gladstone was born in 1809; Mr. Bright died in 1889.

L. D. T.—There is no company of the name in the London Directory. Probably it has ceased to exist.

DAVID.—There was war between Great Britain and Abyssinia in 1868.

CLAUDIAN.—The drama "Claudian" was jointly written by Henry Herman and W. G. Wills.

A. M.—Application for payment of an account may legally be made on a postcard.

FAILURE.—The husband is not liable for his wife's debts contracted before marriage.

ROSE.—Rubbing with pumice-stone after washing in soap and warm water will remove the stains.

HESTER.—All Dudley Castle is in Staffordshire. The town of Dudley is in Worcestershire.

HILDEED.—There is no legal hindrance to the marriage of cousins, or the children of cousins.

KNAVE OF HEARTS.—Bets are not recoverable at law; nor are betting commissions enforceable.

HEATHER.—No, miss, we are not aware of any history attaching to a spray of white heather.

A ROLLING STONE.—Climate of Java is hot, but healthy; official language, Dutch; but English freely spoken.

SCOTTIE.—The last great review of volunteers by the Queen at Edinburgh took place on the 25th of August, 1881.

H. M.—Unless you employed some one to trace him there is no method of finding whether he is dead or alive.

A VICTIM OF NERVE.—No medicine can help you; all depends upon yourself. The more you think about it the worse you will get.

VOLUNTEER'S LASS.—Only one man, Angus Cameron, of Inverness, has won the Queen's Prize at Wimbledon twice.

MOTHER.—The only means of finding out if anything more can be done is to go to a specialist. No one can tell without seeing it.

A LONELY GIRL.—The only possible thing for you to do is to make inquiries in that part of America where you think your mother is.

PHILIP.—Pittman's system is most generally adopted. There is little difference in the difficulty of mastering any of them.

JUANITA.—We do not know the times for attendance, but if you get some friend to go and inquire they will give the information.

LUCIUS.—No; that address should be sufficient; the place is within a mile of Newcastle, N.S.W., the Australian coal port.

GRACIE.—Legerdemain simply means sleight-of-hand tricks. The faculty of performing these tricks is gained by practice.

G. A. T.—The balance of the debt can be recovered any time within six years of the last payment. That is the period prescribed by the Statutes of Limitation.

FRANK.—Unless the man caused some disturbance no one could prevent him from getting drunk in his own house.

GINGER.—We have had no experience with the instrument in question, therefore cannot give an opinion. Before purchasing, you ought to see any article so costly as that referred to.

CEUR DE LION.—Shop assistants and clerks have no business to emigrate. Labourers and men with mechanical trades do well in colonies, but genteel young men had better stop in England.

A. G. G.—A clerkship in the Bank of England or Ireland is got through interest made by a director. Clerks are required to give security in proportion to the responsibility of the position.

PONDERER.—The planet to which you refer is Mars, about which much has lately been published in the newspapers. It has been at its nearest possible proximity to the earth.

T. P.—Of course such an indenture as you describe would be legal and binding on both parties. There seems to have been nothing neglected in executing the indenture.

JUDITH.—Affiliation proceedings must be taken before the magistrates, and an order obtained. The man's obligation under such an order will not be affected by his bankruptcy.

A LOVER OF MUSIC.—John Braham, the famous tenor, was born in London, 1774; died, 1856. Signor Foll (Allan James Foley), born Cahir, Tipperary, date not stated; first public appearance, 1862.

HORATIA.—Hamilton is a surname, originally derived from Humbleton, in Leicestershire, the seat of the original family of Hamilton, the first of whom settled in Scotland in the thirteenth century.

PET.—A canary suffering with asthma can be relieved in the following manner: Take a piece of raw, dry salt pork about an inch square, cover with cayenne pepper, and feed it to the bird.

L. C.—The word "castle" comes to us through the Latin "castellum," a variation of another Latin word, "castrum," which means a fortified place, "castellum," signifying a smaller fortified place or building.

GRIBELDA.—Morganatic marriages legal in Germany are not recognised by the English law; and it is a condition of such marriages that the children have no legal claim to the title, or dignities, or estates of their father.

P. E. M.—Electro-plating is done, as the name suggests, by means of an electric battery; it is quite impossible for you to manage it yourself, even if you had all the material; do not try, we advise you.

OVER AND DONE WITH.

I AM so glad that the trouble and care,
The trials that used to vex me sore,
And cut their way through my heart, nor spare
The tenderest part, will return no more.

For the tears and the fears that once oppressed
My anguished soul, with their weight of woe,
The terrible dread and the vague unrest,
Are over and done with—long ago.

Oh, bitter the tearsdrops once we shed,
When overwhelmed with a mighty loss,
And face to face with our precious dead,
With white hands folded the breast across!

Never but once can we feel the blow
That shattered our idol from its throne,
Never but once such grief can we know
As when we stand by a grave—alone.

All those heartaches that once were ours,
All the terrible grief and pain,
The early blight of our choicest flowers,
Will never hurt us so much again.

For age has brought us a calm content—
A dreadnought-jacket for daily wear,
And up on the heights our lives are spent,
And not in the depths of dark despair.

And though skies in the future be overcast,
And storms prevail, it is bliss to know
That the troubles and trials that vexed our past
Are over and done with—long ago.

S. S. A. W.—The seasons nominally and according to the calendar begin as follows: Spring, March 20, at 3 A.M.; summer, June 20, 11 P.M.; autumn, September 22, 2 P.M.; winter, December 21, 8 A.M.

TRUE HEART.—As a general rule to reduce fat it is necessary to avoid all fattening food, such as butter, pastry, strong tea, eggs, beer, &c., and take plenty of out-door exercise.

E. E. D.—If your stepmother's brother does not press for the payment of the interest, and if there was no clause in the will as to how it was to be paid, we don't think you have any power in the matter. We should advise you to consult a respectable solicitor.

SOLOMON.—We have said over and over again that people should have nothing more to say to a money-lender who asks a fee for inquiries; the interest he charges would cover all that if he meant to do an honest business.

ONE IN TROUBLE.—Rub the stain with soap, and scrape a lot of fine chalk on it; lay it on the grass, and as it dries sprinkle with water. Repeat this once or twice, and if it fails try chloride of lime; but that is rather apt to burn.

DAN.—The Secretary for Scotland can reprove a criminal without referring to the Home Secretary; Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, or Queen's Viceroy, has same power; Irish Secretary has not; he is subordinate to the Viceroy.

T. N.—There is no ready way of obtaining trace of a lost advertisement; the only process is to search diligently till found in files of newspapers, and no man who has once embarked on such a quest will engage in it again lightly.

AMICUS.—There are plenty of positions in the Civil Service for girls. We have not the information about the examinations at hand. Apply at any post office. Wash the hair in warm water in which a little borax has been dissolved, two or three times a week, and use the brush frequently.

HOPE.—You can't enter the navy as a midshipman—at least, in the way you imagine; there is a Civil Service examination to pass, a nomination to obtain, and then a course of study in the Naval College. Position is attainable only by those who have influence and money.

NANNY.—The price of a good she-goat is from 10s. to 12s.; hard to say where you can get one; they are usually in the hands of small dealers, and are often on sale at fairs; put a short advertisement in a paper, and you will get offers.

E. W.—A good thing for removing stains from and cleaning mahogany is one pint of furniture oil mixed with half a pint each of spirits of turpentine and vinegar. Wet a woollen rag with this and well rub into the furniture with the grain. Then polish off with a soft cloth.

INDIGNANT MARIE.—Neither presents nor ring can be taken from you by the man who has broken the engagement; just tell him you decline to part with them, and let him ascertain what he can do next; you do not require to be very tender in your treatment of one who has behaved so cruelly to you.

MALCOLM.—Put your meerschaum pipe in new milk and boil it, removing the scum as long as any continues to rise to the surface; when the milk boils clear, take out the pipe, throw away the boiling, put in fresh milk, and bring to boiling point once more; the pipe will then be clean as new.

BANDY.—There is no cure for bowed legs, either simple or complicated, in a person of your age, we assure you; do not be drawn into any scheme for the accomplishment of the object propounded, it may be by some specious quack or impostor, or "a worse thing may come you."

GRANNIE.—To destroy moths in chairs or furniture generally, beat the cushion well with cane in the open air. Then dissolve one drachm camphor in two ounces of spirits of wine, and sprinkle on the articles. The smell will go off after an hour's exposure to air. This will not injure the colour of the cover.

HARD LINES.—If your parents become chargeable to the parish, you can be summoned to show cause why an order of contribution should not be made upon you. It is for the justices to decide if you are able to pay or not. A man is not bound to contribute towards the support of his wife's parents.

O. C.—We do not advise you to attempt the process. The skin must be first cleansed of hair, fat, and dirt, and washed with lime water, and then with water containing oil of vitriol in small quantity. It should then be immersed in an infusion of oak bark, or other astringent vegetable matter containing tannic acid. The process is a slow one.

JENNY.—A good thing for whitening ivory is sulphuric acid. First well clean the keys with soap, warm water, and a sponge. When dry apply the acid with an old pencil or brush, and if possible place a piece of glass over the keys, and expose to the sun. This process repeated, using the acid again each time it dries, will improve the colour of the ivory.

CLEMENTINA.—This order is obtainable through an M.P. It is not the fact that any of the galleries are "protected by a netting." They are all, with one exception, as open as the galleries of one of our churches. The exception is the ladies' gallery, in front of which there is a handsome lattice-work, or screen, not to protect the occupants, but to secure to them unrestricted privacy. They can see without being seen.

DESTRUCTIVE.—It is said that the soles of shoes will give double wear if they are thoroughly saturated with linseed oil. The oil should be applied before a fire, and allowed to absorb under heat. The soles will take up a large quantity, and will become thoroughly tough without being stiff or hard. When entirely dry they may be worn, but are much better if they are put away for a few days.

N. U.—An applicant for a medical officership in army or navy must be a graduate of a British University, and hold the double qualification of surgeon and physician. He first undergoes an examination at Burlington Gardens, on applying for admission; and, if successful, is passed on to Netley Hospital for three months for training in special subjects; at end of that time he is once more, and finally, examined, then "attached."

C. R. T.—The name of the Phoenix Park, Dublin, is said to be derived from Fionn-uisge, pronounced *Anniske*, and meaning "clear water," and to refer to a chalybeate spring near the main entrance to the Viceregal lodge. The monument referred to commemorates the opening of the park by Lord Chesterfield, and the inscription means, "The Earl of Chesterfield, Lord Lieutenant, erected this at his own cost."

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